



AFRICA REGIONAL SEXUALITY RESOURCE CENTRE

**Sexuality in the Media Report**

*The Coverage of Sexuality by  
the South African Print Media.  
(July-December 2005)*

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#### **Executive Summary**

Information and knowledge are primary forces in the growth of developing countries. In expanding global cycles of information-dissemination, national media plays an especially influential and prominent role. It has a two-fold effect in both reflecting social processes within states, and exercising influence over how civil society as well as government responds to key challenges.

As the recent growth of work on sex and sexuality in Africa reveals, these subjects have become increasingly central to understanding “development” in broad and holistic terms. Not too long ago, the subjects of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights were regarded as unimportant to national development, which tended to be defined in instrumental and economic ways. The growth of academic research, activism and NGO work in this new field indicates a recent

recognition that sexuality is central to human experience and social well-being, and inevitably impinges on different social, biological, ideological, religious, political and economic practices and relationships.

Although so frequently silenced and shrouded in taboo, sexuality is in fact at the very centre of human experience. Consequently an exploration of how the media responds to sexuality, sex rights and sexual health reveals a great deal about developmental challenges. This report considers what the South African media is saying about sex, sexuality and sex rights at a moment when media freedoms have been consolidated in crucial ways. The report highlights the media's prominence in national processes of information dissemination and production. It is argued that the media can be explored as a public forum which reflects important processes (and makes citizens aware of the debates and circumstances that surround them), and which can pro-actively support ongoing struggles for justice, equality and development around bodily integrity, sex rights and sexual health.

## **Introduction**

South Africa presently exhibits animated public dialogues about sexuality, sexual rights and sexual health. These are connected to nascent and explicit debates and struggles around political freedoms. Expressions of these struggles are pronounced in the South African media, and include issues of sexual violence, same-sex relationships, legislation and policy-making around sexual rights and wide-ranging responses to HIV/AIDS.

The main reason for the liveliness of recent public debate is that the government, since 1994, has made tremendous inroads into instituting progressive legal measures for protecting sexual rights and freedoms, and promoting open public talk about sex and sexuality. In contrast to the Apartheid period, when subjects relating to sexuality were strictly censored, discourses of sex, sexual health and sexual rights dramatically erupted into public life from the mid-1990s. There has therefore been a notable quantitative increase of topics related to sexuality in the wake of the introduction of South Africa's new Constitution, scope for press freedom, and official recognition of the rights to bodily integrity, sexual

health and sexual freedoms of marginalized groups, including women, HIV-positive people and gays and lesbians.

Yet the media coverage of sexuality issues reveals a complex situation. As this study shows, a qualitative analysis uncovers complexities that lie beyond the mere *visibility* of coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights issues. While the increase of reporting on formerly taboo areas might seem to be straightforwardly encouraging, the report concentrates on underlying assumptions.

The report analyzes media coverage of sexuality issues between July and December of 2005 by focusing on five newspapers. The publications have been selected on the basis of popularity and readership rates as well as the diversity of viewpoints that they represent (see appendix A). Since the dramatic explosion of sex talk in South Africa has been mirrored in media coverage, the report selects significant patterns and focuses on the following four themes: gender-based violence; protest and advocacy for sexual health rights and choices; policy and legislation related to sexual rights and health; miscellaneous sex and sexuality to

## **1. Methodology**

South Africa's population remains deeply divided in terms of language, ideological outlook, regional interests<sup>1</sup>, class and race. Key reasons for this are: a long history of segregation and, from 1948, Apartheid policymaking; the rigid physical and geographical segregation of racial groups; class, educational and resource inequalities; and the use of nine indigenous languages as well as English and Afrikaans. A definitive survey of how the media targets all sections of the population is therefore beyond the scope of this report. What the report does focus on are representative patterns in current newspaper reporting.

The selected newspapers target significantly different audiences in terms of education, class, race and political orientation. The study deals with: the recently established sensationalist daily publication, the *Daily Voice*; a long-established financial newspaper, *Business Day*; *City Press*, as an explicitly “black”

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<sup>1</sup> The different provinces into which the country is presently divided are based on apartheid policy of segregating the population, and in many cases confining certain groups to impoverished rural areas. Currently, different newspapers still cater for regional interests and priorities within the different provinces that survive into the present.

newspaper; the *Sunday Times*, South Africa's biggest national newspaper; and the *Mail & Guardian*, a left-wing publication targeting an educated readership<sup>2</sup>. These newspapers can be seen as not only *influencing* public views; they can also be seen to reflect perceptions about what different sections of the South African public want to know.

**1.1** In Section 2, the report provides a contextual study outlining the legislative, political and ideological terrain within which media reporting can be properly understood. This contextual study is connected to themes explored in Section 3, which isolates dominant subjects and trends in media reporting. Section 3 provides a qualitative assessment of media coverage of gender violence; sex rights and sexual health struggles; legislative and policy responses; and explicit coverage of sex-related topics. Through tracking stories (excluding inserts) over a six-month period, the survey includes discussion of: the relative prominence given to these stories in terms of length, positioning, and images; an evaluation of the stories in terms of sources used and the selective use of information; and an analysis of headlines. In the case of daily newspapers, the *Voice* and *Business Day*, 12 editions are selected for the period from July to December 2005. In the case of the weekly publications, the *Sunday Times*, the *Mail & Guardian* and *City Press*, 6 editions are selected. The basis of discussion in Section 3 is: the scope devoted to sex, sexual health and sexual rights-related issues relative to other topics, as well as dominant orientations in the reporting on these topics.

**1.2** In Sections 3 and 4, the report undertakes a textual analysis of selected running stories and topical subjects.

These include:

- rape and domestic violence coverage, as highlighting reporting on gender-based violence;
- coverage of GLBTI (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered and Intersexed) struggles and HIV/AIDS treatment activism, including incidents of homophobic violence, litigation cases and protest led by the AIDS activist group, the Treatment Action Campaign;
- coverage of legislation and policy related to sexual health and rights and bodily

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for a profile of these newspapers.

freedoms;

- miscellaneous sex and sexuality coverage, including the *Mail & Guardian's* “Body Language” column and sensation stories in the soft-sell publication, *The Daily Voice*.

The assessment in Sections 3 and 4 involves analyzing individual stories or running stories in terms of their recourse to particular discourses. By undertaking a detailed textual analysis of selected reports, Sections 3 and 4 interpret the range of discourses currently enlisted in coverage of sex and sexuality issues. These sections emphasize the complexity and ambivalence of reporting in relation to such patterns as moral panic about new rights and public debate; ambiguities surrounding “politicizing the personal” in relation to women's bodily security and reproductive rights; the impact of globalized conservative discourses; the mixed impact of the liberal promotion of free speech in the face of South Africa's systemic inequalities and injustice.

**1.3** Section 4 draws conclusions about findings in all five publications with reference to Section 3. Here the emphasis is on evaluating the media's overall impact in shaping, facilitating or suppressing public debate around sexual health and rights concerns. Questions raised here include:

- How has newspaper coverage responded to changing social dynamics in a country facing far-reaching challenges for democratization?
- Has the media responded to the *range* of opinions and vantage points currently articulated around sexual health and sex rights struggles?
- Which vantage points tend to be excluded or sidelined most in media reporting?
- To what extent are dominant views reflected or accommodated in coverage, and what do “dominant views” represent in terms of gender, global, racial and class dynamics?
- To what extent do the media respond to urgent struggles and rights infringements around sexual health and rights in South Africa?

## **2. Context**

A pivotal mechanism for guaranteeing sexual freedoms and rights and all person's bodily integrity in South Africa is the Bill of Rights, as contained in chapter 2 of the South African Constitution, 1996,

Act No. 108 of 1996<sup>3</sup>. This entrenches the right of every person to equality and to freedom and security. Most importantly, it imposes a duty on the government to take appropriate steps to ensure that the human rights of persons are respected.

The Equality Clause of the Bill of Rights states that:

3. The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on any one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour sexual orientation, age disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language and birth.

4. No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection 3. National legislation must be effected to prohibit unfair discrimination. (Chapter 2, Section 9, Bill of Rights).

## **2.1 Gender-Based Violence**

Yet formal measures for protecting the security of all citizens have consistently been undermined in an environment where women and girls daily face the prospect of violation in their homes, communities, schools, workplaces and other public and “private” spaces. In the first year of South Africa's democracy, 19 308 cases of rape were reported to the South African Police Service (SAPS). By 1996, the figure had reached 50 481. In 2000, 52 550 cases of rape and attempted rape were reported to the police, with 21 438 being cases of minors under the age of 18. (see Christofides et al, 2003:1). While consciousness-raising, monitoring, lobbying and activism have addressed mounting violence, Rape Crisis in South Africa reports that there has been a 17.8% increase of reports of rape between 1994 and 2004.

One of the most significant pieces of legislation for addressing these trends is the Domestic Violence Act. Passed in 1998, it is often seen as groundbreaking in acknowledging that domestic violence is a serious social problem and infringement of women's rights and security. The Act offers protection to any survivor in an abusive domestic situation, and makes it obligatory for the Police Services to take specific steps to protect survivors.

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<sup>3</sup> See Appendix B for clauses in the Bill that are directly relevant to citizens individual and collective bodily, sexual and sexual health rights and freedom.

Criticism of its shortcomings concern the fact that it cannot address such issues as learned and politically rooted patterns of violent masculinity; poor women's limited legal recourse and access to protection; or male prejudice in the police services and courts. The Act does, however, signal a clear official recognition that the personal is political, and that increasing cases of violence and abuse within many South African homes are violations that are of public concern and that warrant political intervention.

This awareness is crucial when it is borne in mind that "home" for many abused women, is a site of profound insecurity: in fact, verbal and physical violence in numerous South African homes invalidates the conventional association of danger and risk with public spaces. National statistics from the SAPS show that approximately 1% of rapes reported during 1996 and 1997 were perpetrated by husbands on wives. The publication of statistics on intimate femicide (including the finding that "every six hours a woman is killed by her intimate partner in South Africa") by the South African Medical Research Council in 2004, investigated patterns which had long been registered by certain women's organizations, by activists and by gender researchers. How the media has articulated, contributed to, and responded to sentiments exemplified in the enactment of legislation and the recognition of domestic violence is therefore important in assessing whether it enables lobbying and awareness-raising around subordinate groups' most basic human securities.

While the Domestic Violence Act seeks to address mounting gender based violence, many NGOs, women's organizations and human rights activists argue that South Africa's Sexual Offences Act of 1957 is an inadequate response to the alarming national rate of gender-based violence. The enactment of the revised Sexual Offences Bill in post-Apartheid South Africa has been protracted. Much debate surrounds it at present. Certain activists argue that its current moderate form deviates from the South African Law Commission's draft; it has been stressed that the present version neither adequately defines rape nor sufficiently addresses rape survivors' rights. Lobbying and public debate around the Bill have therefore intensified in the context of ongoing rape cases. As will be illustrated in what follows, the media have responded in ways that enable and support lobbying, as well as in ambiguous and erratic ways.



Currently, therefore, South Africa demonstrates a broad spectrum of legislative, activist and consciousness-raising measures to politicize violence against women. It is therefore significant to consider not only *whether* the media reports on violence against women, but *how* such reporting has been done.

## **2.2 Sexual Rights and Sexual Health Struggles**

While certain injustices related to bodily freedoms and sexual rights have been met with legislation and reactions to legislation, many individual and collective struggles in civil society have called on equity around sexual rights and health. Here, significant struggles have been waged around the recognition of same-sex relationships. In many African countries, homosexuality is deemed a punishable offence; in South Africa, the Constitution explicitly identifies sexual orientation as the basis of unfair discrimination.

Despite this, homophobia, hate speech and physical violence against gays and lesbians persist in society. The Equality Clause has led to cases in the constitutional court being brought by individuals or the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project. Cases have dealt with such areas as adoption and conditions of employment, where same-sex couples have fought for the same rights that married opposite-sex couples have. The South African Cabinet recently approved the Civil Rights Unions Bill, which effectively recognizes same-sex marriages and gives homosexual couples the same rights as heterosexual ones. Parliament has been given until the end of 2006 to recognize the legislation in terms of court judgment.

GLBTI activism from the 90s, and the recent intensification of lobbying around same-sex marriage have occurred against the backdrop of ongoing discrimination and violence against gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Media coverage of both organized and individual struggles, as well as public and official responses to homophobia and the GLBTI community's lobbying are important in ascertaining its role in relation to struggles around rights to sexual choice and freedoms.

Since 1994, the intensity of debate and activism around sexual rights and choices has been echoed in responses to HIV and AIDS. A recent study undertaken by the Human Sciences Research Council

revealed that 10.8% of the South African population over the age of 2 are living with HIV/AIDS (see <http://www.hsrepress.co.za>). Yet the urgency of this situation has often been clouded by deep-seated prejudices and silences.

As is the case in many other contexts, action, belief and debate around AIDS policy-making, treatment and prevention in South Africa are enmeshed in trends such as learned patterns of sexual behaviour, gender-based violence and stigmas and stereotypes. The country currently demonstrates a sharp polarization of belief and feeling. Heated debate was sparked off by President Thabo Mbeki's equivocal pronouncements about the connections between HIV and AIDS in 2000. In the face of global scientific studies of causal connections between AIDS and HIV, Mbeki, and in more recent years, the Minister of Health, have been seen to perpetuate denialism and simplistic recommendations about AIDS treatment and prevention (see statements by TAC at [www.tac.org.za](http://www.tac.org.za)). Moreover, from 2002, the US-driven ABC AIDS policy has steadily infiltrated many health-care and awareness-raising approaches in the country.

Many organizations and individuals in South Africa argue that the ABC preventative approach reflects a denialism openly articulated by AIDS dissidents. The former's lobbying and pronouncement have therefore called for new forms of information-dissemination and public awareness-raising. The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), active since 1998, has been especially vociferous. In recent years it has directed criticism at government's limited financial support for treatment and prevention, and the officially sanctioned stigmatizing of the disease, and made calls on television, on radio and through certain newspapers, for the dismissal of the Minister of Health (see [www.tac.org.za](http://www.tac.org.za)). As the TAC indicates, struggles for adequate policymaking and justice unearth the profound silences and stigmas associated with AIDS. Newspaper coverage of key actors and vantage points in the HIV/AIDS debate is therefore crucial to examining how the media contributes to talk about a disease that is often misunderstood, suppressed, or shrouded in shame.

### **2.3. Sex Talk and Freedom of Speech**

The South African Constitution has not only provided a foundation for activism, lobbying and legislation around sex rights and sexual health; it has also fostered an environment in which South Africans regularly encounter explicit images and talk about sex and sexuality in the public domain. In

sharp contrast to draconian Apartheid censorship, the post-Apartheid climate sanctions irreverent depictions and discussions of sexuality - in cultural expression, through media such as radio, magazines, television, and of course, in certain newspapers. Commenting on this, Deborah Posel writes:

The first noteworthy feature of the politics of sexuality post 1994 is the extent to which sexuality has been thrust into public prominence in ways which would have been absolutely unthinkable and intolerable during the Apartheid years. There is now an abundant circulation of movies, magazines and pornography, previously considered taboo. As is the case in most other liberal democracies, sex scenes in films and television have become de rigeur, even during family hour; sex shops and strip clubs abound, particularly in the suburbs; and the pornography industry is said to be booming. (see <http://wiserweb.wits.ac.za/events%20-%20body.htm>)

At one level, uncensored talk about sex in the public sphere is a healthy index of freedom of expression and a thriving democracy. As Posel's comments suggest, however, irreverent talk or images of sex and sexuality can perpetuate stereotypes or biases. It can militate against, for example, gender justice, bodily integrity for women, or respect for individuals' or groups' rights to privacy and self-determination. It is therefore important to examine implicit ideological biases and commercial agendas in the particularly candid or iconoclastic examples of sex talk in certain newspapers. Attention to these sheds light on how liberal pronouncements about press freedom effectively function in situations where dominant ideologies and market imperatives work to drown out socially marginalized views, and erode substantive freedoms of expression and social justice.

Important reactions to the recent open-ness around sex and sexuality have taken the form of groups and movements claiming to protect African tradition or to defend moral values in society. The South African Constitution safeguards the rights to cultural determination of all groups, and has given traditional leaders important powers in post-apartheid governance. The Congress of Traditional Leaders (CONTRALESA), is an organization based on the “customary” or “traditional” structures and authorities established under Apartheid. Currently, this organization plays a significant part in local and provincial government. It has also helped to drive particular discourses and practices around sexual behaviour, morality and social order.

For example, virginity testing<sup>4</sup>, especially in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, has been co-ordinated by leaders and groups speaking in the name of African tradition and custom. Writing in 2001, Suzanne Leclerc-Madlala states that key proponents of virginity testing have included "a highly vocal chorus of mostly well-educated, male 'African Renaissance' advocates, including national and provincial government ministers, officials in the departments of education and health, non-governmental organizations dedicated to the rediscovery of African traditions and indigenous knowledge systems, and directors of Aids awareness projects" (2001:4). Ostensibly aimed at regulating the morality of young women and girls, and at curbing the spread of AIDS, "traditional" practices assume that women do not have the right to own and control their bodies.

Pronouncements about the alien-ness to African culture of homosexuality, feminist demands, abortion rights and individual freedom of expression have also often been made in the name of safeguarding morality, custom and tradition. And these have escalated in the wake of the passing of certain legislation and highly visible activism and lobbying for sexual rights and freedoms.

In the face of patterns such as escalating drug abuse, violent crime and the spread of AIDS, certain religious, professional and political groupings have increasingly tried to introduce discourses and strategies - especially directed at the youth - for controlling individual sexual behaviour and freedom of expression. In recent years, an umbrella grouping known as the Moral Regeneration Movement has rapidly grown in South Africa. This Movement comprises a range of political and religious organizations and public figures, many of whom promote moral values in relation to individual and social freedoms around gender equality, sexual rights and sexual health. However, it also includes many that advocate clampdowns on the sexual, reproductive and bodily integrity rights which the Constitution guarantees. These individuals and organizations argue that only particular communities, traditions, or values should determine individuals' sexual rights and behaviour.

In South Africa, civil society action, public debate, legislative responses and the affirmation of

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4 Virginity testing involves young girls being examined to ascertain whether or not they are "virgins". It is a practice ostensibly based on tradition, although research indicates that it is a recent phenomenon and spiralled from the mid-1990s (See Leclerc-Madlala, 2001).

previously denied liberties suggest dramatically changing social attitudes. These processes seem to be shaping an environment in which the media has enormous licence, and articulates more and more political and personal freedoms for South Africa's citizens. Yet much of the prominent sex talk also sets limits on what kinds of freedoms are possible, and who articulates these freedoms.

## **2.4 Gender Biases, Sex Talk and the Media**

One pivotal reason for these limitations is that the South African media industry since 1994 has remained emphatically patriarchal. While gender-based violence is obviously linked to patriarchal privilege and power, all biases around reporting on sex rights and sexuality issues clearly do not stem from gender inequalities. But patriarchal and authoritarian structures, relationships and mindsets are clearly linked to taboos around sex and sexuality, to heterosexism, and to rigidly regulating sexual identities and behaviour.

It is noteworthy, for example, that many of the South African organizations and figures linked to this country's traditional leadership structures and Moral Regeneration Movement are led by men, and implicitly or directly advocate paternal supremacy. Patriarchal authority in these organizations coexists with the belief that individuals should *not* have complete freedoms and self-determination about their bodies, reproductive potential and sexuality. Such authority also reflects firm views about airing sexuality discourses in public. Calls for moral transformation in post-Apartheid South Africa have also stressed the value of hetero-normative institutions and relationships which rigidly fix sexual roles and behaviour for men as well as women.

The connections between patriarchy and sexuality discourses - exemplified in many organizational and ideological trends in South Africa - have been the subject of growing research interest from the late twentieth century. Disciplines including feminist studies, anthropology, sociology and cultural studies, reveal a growing interest in the the continuities between gender relations and sexual identities, as well as taboos around sexual behaviour and attitudes. Judith Butler's *Undoing Gender* (2004) exemplifies this research. Butler comprehensively shows how scientific practice, popularized taboos, normative sexual orientation, and hegemonic beliefs and knowledges about sex are all connected to gender norms. Such work emphasizes that gender discrimination and patriarchal bias crucially influence prohibitions around sexuality and widespread ideas about sexual identities.

At an obvious level, such discrimination and bias in the media is evident in gender-blind or explicitly male-centred patterns of reporting. The Global Media Monitoring Project Report for South Africa in 2005 showed that newspapers, as opposed to television or radio, are a medium where the profile across gender has rapidly become less unequal. Despite this, the report argued, entrenched male dominance in reporting has been perpetuated through, for example, situations in which the coverage of stories with female content has reporters of 70% as compared with 30% of female reporters.

Identifying the categories of crime and violence; social and legal; celebrity, arts and sport; politics and government; science and health; and the economy, the South African GMMP report also showed that women subjects featured most often in reporting on crime and violence, and were least represented in traditionally male spheres, especially the economy, politics and government. In other words, a stark gender hierarchy continues to prevail in media representations of gender roles and identities: women are still portrayed as victims and objects in largely voyeuristic stories about crime and violence; men are generally represented as agents and leaders in stories that directly reinforce traditional notions of masculinity.

The ongoing marginalization of women reporters and gender-related subjects in the media were recently commented on by Ferial Haffajee, the black woman editor of the *Mail & Guardian*:

With a loud women-in-media movement in South Africa, we do best in the region, but often the coverage that is lauded is occasion-specific: an acknowledgement of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence Campaign; tough coverage of the loutish behaviour of the members of the Friends of Jacob Zuma Trust outside the court, as well as interviews with female Cabinet ministers (usually as they are appointed) and with the Deputy President Phumizile Mlambo-Ngcuka, on her appointment last year. (“Fair Deal”, ([http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=266342&area=/insight/insight\\_\\_comment\\_and\\_analysis/](http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=266342&area=/insight/insight__comment_and_analysis/))

Even when blatant stereotyping and inequality appear to be transcended, discourse analysis of coverage reveals deeply entrenched patriarchal, hetero-normative and essentialist biases, as well as

perspectives rooted in dominant or official ideologies. These biases were clear in reporting on the rape of Nombonisa Gaza, a woman whose high-profile case was covered three years into democracy, a time of (ostensibly) heightened awareness about rights, justice and gender equality. Lisa Vetten has described the media coverage in the following way:

The assault was widely and schizophrenically reported on, with Ms Gasas being portrayed at various times as a liar, a survivor/heroine, an indulged government favourite, or MP Raymond Suttner's wife. One Afrikaans newspaper, along with some members of the SAPS denounced Ms Gasas as a liar who concocted a false rape allegation... *The Sunday Independent* chose to explore how Ms Gasas's husband, MP Raymond Suttner, was coping with the assault, while a letter-writer to the same paper took another tack altogether, suggesting that Ms Gasas, as a "high-profile, politically prominent figure", was being treated far too favourably by the police service and government in comparison to the rest of the populace (a fascinating claim, considering the findings of the Independent Complaints Directorate (ICD) who investigated the SAPS' handling of this case. (Vetten, 1998)

Dealing with more recent trends in 2003, Barbara Boswell has focused on sample coverage from two Cape Town newspapers' reporting on rape, and concludes as follows.

[T]he *Cape Times* and the *Cape Argus* largely continue to either trivialise the issue of gender-based violence by downplaying or ignoring it in reporting, or perpetuates negative stereotypes of women and gender-based violence through their reporting. Out of 28 reports on gender-based violence gathered within a five-day period, only one was sensitively written, without trivialising the issue or perpetuating negative myths about women and gender-based violence. The compassion and sensitivity shown by this single reporter is sadly lacking in most other reports.

Boswell goes on to give the following sobering caution:

Increasing the numbers of women in editorial and senior decision-making positions are no

guarantee for sensitive portrayals of GBV. Putting more women into positions of power in media institutions will not fully transform the way the media reports on GBV; what is needed is commitment from media houses to transform themselves and to begin the process of institutional change, both in the way they treat women journalists, and in their treatment of women as news subjects.

Such observations indicate that the media's transformation cannot rest on individuals, or on token and random changes. South African media reporting on sex, sexual health and sexual rights issues occurs in the context of entrenched power relations, ideological frameworks and national and internal agendas and market forces. Consequently, information-gathering and lobbying for substantive media transformation requires vigilance, careful analysis and political insight.

### **3. Sample Survey and Discourse Analysis**

#### **3.1 The *Sunday Times***

Between July and October of 2005, the subjects of the *Sunday Times* front page news included investigations into the murder of mining magnate, Brett Kebble; the kidnap of a young boy, the transformation of Intelligence Services by the Minister; and the sacking of Jacob Zuma as deputy president because of his implication in the trial of a businessmen jailed for corruption. Out of the 6 newspapers selected, one contained a front-page story relating to sexuality and sex rights issues, namely the November 13 edition covering the charge of rape laid against former deputy President, Jacob Zuma.

##### **3.1.1 Gender Violence**

Of the two gender and violence stories in the selected newspaper, one, in the October 30 edition, dealt with a woman's rape in prison. The story appeared on page 7 and comprised 3 columns of news, with one image depicting the affected woman with the child fathered by her rapist. The report illustrates reasonably balanced fact-gathering. Quoted sources are the rape survivor and a police spokesperson, and the reporter gives a detailed account of the circumstances of the rape, and the lenient responses to the three policemen accused of raping her. The woman's testimony is emphasized in the account, even



though her actual words are quoted briefly.

Accessed voices in the Zuma rape accusation story are very different. The November 13 coverage of the charge of rape against Zuma, a breaking news story, totally marginalizes the voice of the complainant. As the first newspaper to cover the rape allegation, the *Sunday Times* sensationalizes the incident as a shocking story about a prominent public figure. The story highlights central narrative episodes without much follow-up of the sources quoted or incidents mentioned. While the complainant is quoted, her testimony is invoked only to stress a sensational incident, the charge of rape. The story also goes on to connect the rape accusation to a broader story, run throughout the year by several South African newspapers, of Zuma's sacking as deputy minister and the explosive responses of his supporters.

Significantly, in the first edition after the November 13 breaking news story of alleged rape by Zuma (20 November), the newspaper's editorial presented a powerful call to perceive rape from the viewpoint of the survivor. Headlined "Rape is about the Survivor", the editorial is in part a defense of the newspaper's coverage of the rape allegation, coverage which many condemned. Questioning the way that "many have raged at this newspaper for reporting the fact of the allegation", it insists that the story should ultimately be about "a woman so hurt and angry that she mustered the courage to lay a charge of rape against the man she trusted as a father and loved as a friend". It concludes with the statement "Rape is about the survivor, and not the perpetrator".

This is an important reflection of the newspaper's perception of its need to provide principled and balanced reporting. Yet the breaking news story for 13 November certainly did not prioritize these principles. Overall, then, the newspaper seems to follow both market imperatives for sensationalism, as well as principled and socially accountable reporting. This tension is also manifested in the way the *Sunday Times* routinely publishes a picture of a "pin-up girl" on its Back Page. Sensitive coverage in certain stories therefore needs to be considered alongside a broader editorial policy which prioritizes "popular appeal" through the standard media objectification of women's bodies.

The erratically principled attention to gender-based violence is clearly manifested in the 9 September edition of the newspaper. Coverage here was prompted by the South African Police Service's (SAPS) annual crime statistic released in the week. The editorial, titled “Stopping rape is everyone's duty” outlined the SAPS improved strategies for dealing with crime generally, but against the backdrop of rising statistics of rape. On page 5, the newspaper also covered the topic of rape in a long article written by four staff reporters. Headlined “SA brutalizes women, girls”, the article quotes sources including the police, and spokespersons from the organization, Rape Crisis and women's shelters. It is accompanied by a map indicating the prevalence of rape - among other crimes - in particular regions. This edition of the newspaper also provided a story of rape in the small town of Marico, made famous by a well-known South African writer. According to statistics released by the South African Police, this town had the highest reports for rape in South Africa. Overall, therefore, this edition quite boldly takes up two media challenges. One is the raising of public awareness about a silenced human rights violation, an insistence that gender-based violence is a major societal problem that must be exposed. The other is a call to readers to take some form of attitudinal or political responsibility in acknowledging mounting violence against women.

### **3.1.2 Sex Rights and Legislation**

Coverage of issues relating to sex rights and legislation were more pronounced in the *Sunday Times* than those covering gender-based violence. A long article in the October 23 edition, accompanied by an image, focused on attitudes towards gays in mosques and the church in South Africa. The article appeared in the “Insight and Opinion” section of the *Sunday Times* towards the back of the paper. It provides a detailed and balanced account, focusing on the views of gay members of certain faiths and gay religious leaders as those whose views are generally drowned out in public spaces. It also recounts the opposition to homosexuality of two religious leaders, and provides commentary on gay struggles by the journalist. Letters in a subsequent newspaper respond to this article and indicate its role in sparking off public debate .

The December 4 issue also deals with homosexuality by devoting a full page (page 7) to the Constitutional Court's ruling on 1 December that Parliament should enact legislation for legalizing gay

marriage, and publishing 3 articles on the topic. Although the full page of three articles is important, the subject was clearly deemed less important than the front page news of the predictable “important” topic of “government”, in this case, rumours of Kgalema Motlanthe, the ANC boss, being probed for subversion.

In the most prominent article on this page, the seriousness of the coverage of the court's ruling is watered down by the headline, “Same-sex marriage: who pays lobola”. This headline picks up on a joke made by a lesbian couple interviewed for the story about who would pay for whom. The purpose may be to add human interest, but it has the effect of trivializing a legal triumph for which many gay and lesbian couples and activists have long fought. Even though the article proceeds to give information about the ruling's implications for gay rights, and quotes two sources from gay organizations, as well as the Minister of Home Affairs, the prominent headline creates a flippant frame. The two other articles on same-sex marriage provide contrasting frames. One, written by the *Sunday Times* legal editor, critically appraises the caution of the ruling. The writer argues that the ruling is not attentive enough to constitutional provisions for groups discriminated against on the basis of sexual orientation. The other, a short column of 4 paragraphs, quotes three religious leaders and the chairperson of the Human Rights Commission, whose views range from opposition to the ruling, to a call for the need to respect it.

The September 18 edition of the *Sunday Times* contains no text coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sex rights. But the front page carried a large colour photograph of a protest, led by traditionalists, against the Children's Bill, eventually enacted at the end of 2005. The image captures a large group of women and girls, clothed in “traditional” attire (the young girls are bare-breasted and wear loin cloths, and the women wear t-shirts and beaded skirts) outside an official building. The picture appears beneath the large caption, “The Bottom Line”. The phrase presumably refers to the general prominence of naked buttocks in the photograph. It also refers to two prominent figures in the foreground, with a woman's hand placed, in a gesture that might be castigating or protective, on the buttocks of one of the young girls. This coverage of legislation glaringly trivializes the topic of children's rights, and in particular, the violation of children's bodily rights under customary law, which countenances virginity testing. Opposition - co-ordinated by leaders with large followings of women and children in many communities - to law reform is turned into a puerile joke about protesters' exposed bodies. It is

noteworthy that the display of women's nakedness is often the subject of humour or ridicule in the media. This coverage of a sexuality issue has not only trivialized a political issue around sexual rights; it has reinforced the predictable media objectification of women's bodies.

### **3.1.3. HIV/AIDS coverage**

By the start of 2006, the *Sunday Times* had launched a campaign, the “Everyone Knows Someone” campaign, providing a forum in the print and online<sup>5</sup> versions of the newspaper for the public to share their stories about how they have coped with the HIV/AIDS. As a national newspaper, the *Sunday Times* had presumably taken seriously the need to provide a regular space for raising public awareness about the need to destigmatize the disease. This dramatically shifted the status of HIV/AIDS coverage in the print version of the newspaper. Of the 361 stories referring to and dealing with HIV/AIDS between 21 October 2005 and the present, approximately 80% of the stories were published in 2006, and only about 70 were published in 2005. The *Sunday Times* also initiated a report on AIDS, including AIDS coverage in the report's online packages of globally relevant events and issues. Technically, an online focus on AIDS is easier to manage, with all relevant articles being retrospectively archived, organized and sourced for easy access. The regular publication of AIDS coverage in each print edition is, however, a greater challenge, and it is one which the *Sunday Times* has clearly seen the need to take up.

But this challenge on the part of the most widely read newspaper in South Africa was taken up only in 2006. Coverage of AIDS in the second half of 2005 was intermittent and included inspirational and warning stories: for example, “Pupils use stage to teach others about HIV/AIDS” (25 September) or “The Playboy DJ who played with his life” (11 September). The

December 4 edition has prominent coverage. This includes a short article on how older men have been primarily responsible for the spread of AIDS; and a special report, headlined “The young and the reckless”, on a small town which used interviews with residents to explore why infection rates there are so high. The edition also contained a long article on page 4. Titled “Stop the bickering on Aids:

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<sup>5</sup> The *Sunday Times* has fully exploited the potential for disseminating news via the internet and in print. The majority of South Africans do not have access to the internet, and many newspaper readers do not regularly use the Internet. At the same time, the Internet has become an increasingly important source for many South Africans, and its revolutionary potential in disseminating material has been capitalized on by most established newspapers.

Sexwale”, the report deals with the address of a businessman and former politician who commented critically on government's equivocation around the causes of AIDS and appropriate methods for its treatment.

Online coverage of AIDS for the second half of 2005 is also worth noting in considering the newspaper's evolving commitment. The main online coverage of AIDS for the second half of 2005 responded to Khomanani Pledge Day, a government initiative to encourage South Africans to pledge their support in the fight against HIV/AIDS. The 6 stories published online were: an article publicizing a report by Statistics South Africa, released in early October of 2005, on deaths between 1997-2003, (“New stats leave no doubt about what's killing people – its Aids”). Another story covered opposition at a medical conference to the government's perceived incompetence in dealing with AIDS treatment and infection, “HIV/Aids ‘ape’ stuns medical conference”. A third report covered Zackie Achmat's (the TAC activist's) documentary film, which situates AIDS activism in an ongoing tradition of human rights struggles in South Africa, (“HIV warrior takes on law”). A fourth story covered Achmat's denunciation of the perceived attack of the state on the TAC, (“TAC victim of state-led campaign, says Achmat”). A fifth article was an AIDS timeline from 1982 to the present, documenting key events and processes around the spread of the disease and different responses to it, (“From obscure gay plague to national political struggle”). The sixth article provides information about the government's Khomani Project, (“Your pledge can help fight Aids”)

Overall, October 7 online coverage brings together a broad cross-section of views and responses for raising public awareness about the spread of the disease.. But the prominence of this coverage only in a particular month is similar to the concerted coverage of women's and gender issues in August, South African women's month. When contrasted with the relative paucity of AIDS coverage in other editions of the newspaper, this pattern reveals a sporadic events-oriented media attention to rights, rather than a response to ongoing struggles.

### **3.1.4 Dominant Trends in the *Sunday Times***

Although it sporadically takes on the responsibility of raising public awareness around sexual rights

and health, the *Sunday Times* tends to sensationalize or trivialize stories of sex and sexual rights in its main sections. Reflective and provocative stories often appear in the “Opinions and Insight” section, and are written by writers other than newspaper staff. Stories are therefore conceptualized outside of the “core business” of the paper, where coverage of sex and sexuality issues often steers clear of provocative commentary, or extensive critical investigation. Commentary by commissioned writers in the “Opinions and Insight” section indicates that the *Sunday Times* has responded to a perceived public demand. This demand stems from views expressed in the public domain, and from civil society action, and it has put pressure on a leading national newspaper to provide socially responsive reporting on sexual health and sex rights struggles.

The same pressure led to the “Everyone Knows Someone Campaign” from 2006. The *Sunday Times* editorial policy on coverage of sexuality, sexual health and sexual rights struggles has therefore not pro-actively shaped public opinion around sexuality, sexual health and sex rights issues. Rather, coverage is receptive to an existing demand for a variety of information and public debate on long sidelined issues. This is an important measure of the newspaper's answerability to the public. As a newspaper targeting readers across racial, class and regional boundaries, the *Sunday Times* does create a space for different groups to access diverging views around sex rights and sexual health. At the same time, this flexible forum is shaped by reporting conventions which often sensationalize or marginalize issues. The social and political implications of sexuality issues are constrained by an avoidance of political tendentiousness, the prioritizing of moderate views about sex and sex rights, and a perception that the target audience does not require or want too much “provocation”.

### **3.2. The *Mail & Guardian***

Front page news for this period included stories of local politics, moves to fire Jacob Zuma, speculations about succession, scandals and corruption such as the Oilgate Scandal, the role of the country's largest trade union movement in relation to political intrigues, the conflict between the Minister of Intelligence and the director general of the National Intelligence Agency.

Like the *Sunday Times*, the *Mail & Guardian* prioritized the topics of sexual rights and legislation

rather than stories of gender-based violence. However, as is the case with the *Sunday Times*, the Zuma rape trial made front page news in the second half of 2005. The *Mail & Guardian* regularly provides a short HIV/AIDS monitor towards the back of the newspaper. This is a short column with information and comments on the state of AIDS globally, and obtained from various sources. The selection of information for this seems arbitrary in relation to other coverage in each edition.

The other regular feature dealing with sexuality is the “Body Language” column, to which different writers contribute, and usually appearing between pages 20 and 26. Often humorous and tongue-in-cheek, it is occasionally polemical or overtly political about sexual rights and justice. In the newspapers surveyed, five subjects were light: remarks on how popular stories reveal that women encourage male sexual aggression (July); a male writer attesting to the fact that women generally undertake large and invisible quantities of domestic work (August); the awkwardness of female condoms (September); a woman writer's account of a testicle-like lump on her genitals (October); the history of the term, “spinster”. Zoe William's article in the November 18-24 edition responds strongly to the baiting of feminists in recent years.

### **3.2.1 Opinions on Sex Rights and Sexual Health in the *Mail & Guardian***

Coverage of sexual rights struggles range from a critique of a prominent gay and lesbian organization to long opinion pieces by prominent gay rights supporters in the “Comment and Analysis” Section. The 8-14 July edition covered a half-page story with the headline “Crunch Time for Gay activists” dealing with the abuse of funds by the Lesbian and Gay Equality Project. The story appears on page 9, and is written by film and art critic Matthew Krouse, who generally uses an irreverent tone in dealing with culture and politics. The same edition published a long article, also functioning as an obituary, by TAC activist, Zackie Achmat on the death of the gay rights lawyer Ronald Louw of AIDS. The article extends over two pages on pages 26 and 27, and is accompanied by images of the dead lawyer and Achmat. It is noteworthy that the two articles appeared in the same newspaper.

A clear stand in support of gay rights is also evident in Bishop David Russell's article, “It is Time for Repentance” in the 18-24 November's edition's “Comments and Analysis” section. Responding to the Constitutional Court's imminent ruling, Russell condemns homophobia in the church, and uses examples from the scriptures to support the South African Constitution's provision for all persons'

equal rights.

The August 5 – 11 edition coincided with South African Women's Day on 9 August. The edition also had a special Women's Day insert. The emphasis was celebratory, and on assessing processes for establishing women's political equality and representation, rather than on women's rights and struggles around bodily and sexual justice. The only article in the supplement which deals squarely with women's bodily security and sexual justice is written by Fiona Macleod, whose focus as a journalist ranges from human rights to the environment. Her article, headlined “Protecting Womens' Rights” assesses the extent to which recent legislation and policy actually guarantee women's basic security, their freedom from violence. The Women's Day edition as a whole does not address gender or sexual rights, and is dominated by a conventional male-stream attention to national politics. However, the edition does contain an HIV/AIDS story situated uncharacteristically on page 11 in the business section. Headlined, “Bringing Light to Employees”, the story deals with a women's discovery of her HIV-positive status and sickness, and with her employer's efforts to give her financial and emotional assistance.

### **3.2.2 AIDS and Rights Violation Coverage**

A much stronger effort to raise public awareness of AIDS is evident in the 2-8 September edition. The story takes up approximately  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a page, and is provocatively headlined, “Why Don't We Know”. Explicitly defining a role of watchdog and public ally for the newspaper, the report describes the alarming findings of a government-commissioned report on AIDS and HIV, and indicates that these findings have not been given due publicity. Another story about the official suppression of information on sex rights is published on this page. This report deals with a civil society outcry about the National Prosecuting Authority's failure to act on or to publicize the findings of a report on rape in the Western Cape. Both stories are well-balanced, give full details of the main findings of the report and demonstrate that the usual procedures for following up of such research have been compromised.

Significantly, these reports appear in the national section of the newspaper, and highlight the national relevance of official action around research on sexuality issues. The reports therefore carry an authority which many of the articles in, for example, the *Sunday Times* “Opinions and Insight” pages do not. In the same edition of the *Mail & Guardian*, then, a forthright opinion piece in the “Comments and



Analysis” section is given greater force because it is contextualized by the newspaper's focus on sex rights violations as a national issue. The report describes a woman winning the support of the constitutional in suing the Minister of Safety and Security for damages after she was raped by two policemen employed by the state. Titled, “Which Comes First”, it affirms the rights of citizens to hold the state accountable for safeguarding human rights.

This clearly contrasts with the cautious response to the story of rape accusations against Jacob Zuma. Following up the breaking news story of the *Sunday Times*, the *Mail & Guardian* coverage of the rape allegations in the 18-2 edition is speculative and restrained. The article reviews different views that have emerged in the media around the rape allegations. Headlined, “Cops, NIA sucked into 'rape' war”, the story ultimately emphasizes the political implications of the rape charges in relation to Zuma's complex political position. The story *does* go on to follow up the details around the rape allegation. But it demonstrates the extent to which stories of rape involving prominent public figures are clouded by the media's attention to the “broader” significance of discredited high-profile public figures.

In the October 14- 20 edition, a prominent half-page article dealing with child-trafficking and headlined “Have You Seen These Children?” also clearly emphasizes the connection between sex rights violations and national processes. Published in the “National” section, it deals with the large numbers of children who disappear from two of the most densely populated provinces in South Africa. The article explores statistics given by the police, in contrast to child rights organizations. It also uses sources ranging from police spokespersons, MPs, child rights organization employees, and parents of missing children. It draws attention to the rights abuses that shadow many children's disappearances.

The 9-14 December edition had the least coverage of sex and sex rights issues among the 6 newspapers selected. Apart from the newspaper's regular body language column and AIDS barometer, an article in the “Comments and Analysis” section deals with the urgency of HIV/AIDS as a subject for feminist activism. Headlined “A New Feminism”, the article calls on feminists to address the gendered dimensions of AIDS, and stresses that responses to it should be integral to contemporary feminist activism.

### **3.2.3 Dominant Trends in the *Mail and Guardian***

The *Mail & Guardian*, to some extent like the *Sunday Times*, positions sex/sex rights coverage in a separate section devoted to opinions expressed by writers other than newspaper staff. But it has also made a much greater effort to integrate such coverage into reporting on national issues and the core business of the newspaper. The coverage of influential reports on sexual health and sex rights especially, indicates the newspaper's perception of its role in making suppressed knowledge available, and in concertedly moulding public opinion. Also of importance is the attention paid to analysis and explanation. Avoiding the superficiality associated with ostensibly “neutral” attention to immediately available information, there is often a recognition that easily accessible facts can perpetuate certain taboos, blind spots and concealments around sex rights struggles. The *Mail & Guardian* can therefore be seen to be defining a catalytic role for itself in bringing to light what has been unsaid, suppressed, or denied – by officials, by policymakers, and in dominant discourses of gender and sexuality.

At the same time, unevenness in the newspaper's reporting on sex and sex rights also warrants scrutiny. Certain articles claim that sex rights violations are of national concern, that civil society can and should be vigilant about law reform and state responses, that many groups and institutions in South Africa are acting and speaking in ways that threaten rights provided in the Constitution. Yet this is not fully sustained in the overall editorial policy of the newspaper. On one level, provocative interventions into emerging sexual rights, sexual health and bodily violation rights are explicitly aired. On another level, such interventions are seen to take second place to conventional coverage of hard news and front page coverage of predictable “hard” topics.

The newspaper categorizes coverage according to many conventional dichotomies, for example, between hard and soft news, between political and social issues, between public issues and personal lifestyle choices. And these are often precisely the neat oppositions that sexuality issues defy. The paucity of stories covering incidents of gender-based violence are a reflection of the newspaper's veering away from disparaged “soft” subjects in its emphasis on quality journalism. In fact, it is noteworthy that stories of domestic violence are generally covered more frequently in dailies with regional or community target audiences (such as the *Cape Times* or the *Argus*), rather than in weeklies with national readership. The latter are under greater pressure to produce coverage of hard news with national significance. And domestic violence and rape continue to be trivialized in this view of media

topics' relevance.

Traditional patterns of weighting hard against soft news, or of strictly distinguishing between political and social affairs or between personal lifestyle issues and public social concerns reflect conventions about what “politics” usually means in liberal democracies. The everyday rights violations of ordinary people, while often acknowledged by the *Mail & Guardian*, are generally not deemed politically central, or appropriate subjects for front-page investigative journalism. A broader view of the political – transcending government and governance, and concerning everyday struggles, and the response of civil society to the state – was very evident in the South African alternative press under Apartheid, including the then, *Weekly Mail*. The shift to a conventional focus on government and governance reflects the newspaper's shift away from a populist definition of “politics” towards a liberal democratic definition which assumes that politics is embedded within state processes and government.

This shift can also be seen to reflect an elitist avoidance of stories often covered in terms of the categories of sensation, misadventure, lifestyle and human interest. The *Mail & Guardian* has been globally marketed as a newspaper dedicated to intellectual and political analysis and adhering to international standards of journalistic professionalism. The coverage of everyday rights struggles, especially through topics such as rape, might be deemed too “mundane” in sustaining this image. Gender-based violence, in particular, veers towards the human interest and sensationalism often demonstrated in other newspapers. The limitations of the newspaper's coverage of sexuality issues is therefore considerably shaped by its adherence to dominant assumptions about journalistic professionalism and integrity.

### **3.3. *City Press***

Like the *Sunday Times* from 2006, and the *Mail & Guardian*, *City Press* has a regular AIDS monitoring feature in the form of an online AIDS Focus. Its back page, in contrast to that of the largely a-political and sensationalist back page of the *Sunday Times*, seems geared towards frank discussion of sex, including AIDS and its stigmatized status. *City Press'* last page indicates some effort to break away from a predictably escapist formula for “the back page”. Part of this section is used to generate opinions and reflections on sex talk for men *and* women, and to suggest that such talk impinges on public well-being, democratic processes and national interests. Although this newspaper's back page is

far from radical, and generally has a pin-up girl, its regular features often aim at provocative reflections about gendered and sexualised relationships.

*City Press* front page news in newspapers selected between July and December was dominated by national politics in the form of the tension between Thabo Mbeki and his discredited deputy president. One edition focused on South Africa's large loan to Zimbabwe and another on conflict within the National Intelligence.

### **3.3.1: Patterns of Marginalizing Sex Rights Coverage**

The July 3 edition squarely addresses rights and justice issues as topics of national political and economic importance. The edition deals with poverty and unemployment rates and investigates the plight of job scavengers in Johannesburg. Yet coverage of sex and bodily integrity rights are sidelined within this coverage of rights. The only sex health/rights story is approximately 150 words in length, and reports on page 3 that Miss Universe will take a public AIDS test. Also of interest is an article in the “Lifestyle” column, dealing with the trend towards inter-racial sex in South Africa. Rather than focusing on rights, this article reflects on evolving personal choices and relationships in the country. It could therefore be seen as a media intervention that implicitly encourages tolerance towards changing sexual behaviour.

Another example of such an effort is a column, written by Amanda Ngudle, called “Sex in Another City”. The column does not raise contentious views, and generally expresses predictable stereotypes around sexual and gender relationships. What makes it noteworthy as an effort to open up sex talk is that it gives a woman journalist the licence to speak frankly about sex; it challenges the entrenched view that women are merely the objects or subjects of men's sexual discourse. Although it may be unconventional to use a woman journalist for this coverage, the content of her column is certainly not iconoclastic. For example, in her July 3 column she addresses a male reader to explain what typically feminine needs are, and advises her brother about how to keep his girlfriend happy.

Like the July edition, the August edition selected does not prioritize sex and sexual rights. The main stories on rights and justice focus on issues of class, race and access to political power. One prominent article reviews the spate of strikes in South Africa, and concludes that their frequency is an index of

workers' being sold out by politicians. Another long article in the main news section deals with the low wages of mine workers. A third prominent article covers racial injustices at different South African universities. Although a number of stories on sexual health and rights are published, their brevity reveals their perceived insignificance as human rights/justice issues.

Coverage of sexual rights, health and bodily integrity in the August 7 edition are especially revealing. The edition includes a short article, about 400 words in length, headlined, "Djs 'change sex' to raise money". It deals with a campaign, led by prominent Johannesburg djs, to raise money for women survivors of abuse, by dressing up as women. The emphasis is on the quirkiness of the event, with the novelty of prominent djs appearing publicly dressed as women. The djs comments are accessed, and even though the article refers to the organization driving the campaign, its purpose and reasons are not stressed.

Another small article, tucked inbetween others, in the August 7 edition is headlined "Dad Jailed for raping daughter" and appears on page 8. This is a follow-up story of the father's sentencing for repeatedly raping his twelve-year-old daughter. The story routinely recounts court procedure and information gathered only from the journalist's use of this source. The possibility of the mother, to whom the girl is reported to have confided, as a source for the story is not pursued, with this indicating the low priority of this kind of story in the newspaper.

Some attention to AIDS and gender violence is implicit in an article longer than the two above, a 4-column article, headlined "African child deaths shock". The article responds to a book produced by the Census Analysis Project which found that black child deaths are three times higher than those in other population groups. Another short report, titled "Say bye to home HIV tests" appears at the bottom of page 7. It raises the dangers of home testing systems, quoting the director of the industry responsible for manufacturing the tests, as well as the chairperson of the South African Medical Association, which has clamped down firmly on the sale and use of these tests.

Three articles towards the back of the paper explicitly reveal the ways in which sex health and rights issues are compromised within the paper's broader attention to social justice. The column by Khatu Mamaila, "Third Eye", titled, "Level of Morality Very Low", deals with virginity testing and its

proposed banning by policymakers. The main argument is that the morals of policymakers are low because they are curtailing certain individuals' and groups' powers over the bodies and rights of children.

In the “Lifestyle” section, Amanda Ngudle, in addition to her “Sex in Another City” column, is the writer of a story headlined “Couples May need to become porn again”. Ostensibly an libertarian response to taboos around sex, the story is willfully blind to the denigration of women in the porn industry, and makes no connections between this industry and South Africa's broader climate of violence against women. Playfully insisting that couples (implicitly seen as heterosexual) should enjoy porn in order to energize their sex lives, the story is a revealing indication of how free talk can effectively sanction dominant gender and sexuality biases and injustices.

On the back page, Agrippa Khatide's regular column, “Holy Sex and Relationships” provides an article headlined “Sex and the new education language policy”. It is the most informative and encouraging of the three as an effort to generate critical thinking about sex issues and rights in South Africa. The main argument is that, while there has been a broad promotion of public talk about sexuality in South African public life, such talk is dominated by the use of English. Khatide states that there is a need to rethink language policy around effective ways of raising public awareness in relation to such issues as responsible sex, AIDS or gendered power and sexuality.

### **3.3.2 Sexuality in Relation to Justice Issues**

As is the case with previous issues, the populist political orientation of the September 11 issue is evident in stories such as accounts of dispossessed sack dwellers, or the betrayed legacy of Black Consciousness activist, Steve Biko, in post-apartheid South Africa. But the September 11 edition also makes some effort to connect sexuality issues to coverage of justice in its prominent story about the Department of Education's marginalizing of AIDS. Headlined “Department ignores HIV study on teachers”, it covers the main findings of the report, in particular the main recommendation that all teachers be tested for HIV. The article extensively quotes research undertaken by a leading research network, the Human Sciences Research Council, and quotes both the HSRC director general, the HIV/AIDS coordinator of the South African Democratic Teachers' Union and a spokesperson from the Department of Education. The topic is neither trivialized by being brief, nor marginalized by being

located in separate “opinions” pages. It is squarely situated in the “Education” section, and stresses the centrality of AIDS to one of the country's main sectors.

The page opposite this report carries a story of the rise of a public movement around virginity testing. The story is prominent, with a large image, almost equal in size to the space taken by text, of young girls doing a reed dance as part of a virginity testing ceremony. The story is headlined, “Reed dancers overcome by scorching KZN heat”, with this shifting the rights/justice questions linked to the practice, to a sensation-cum-humorous story about “custom”. Much of the story deals with the performance of the dance, and it is only towards the end of the report that political questions around the event are raised. The implications of virginity testing in supporting traditional gendered power are implied by the accessed voices of public figures who support virginity testing, and an account of the revival of this ceremony at a time when the powers of traditional leaders were under threat. But the report is not, overall, a balanced or well-covered one. In view of the enormous controversy around women's and children's rights in customary law, and the ongoing tensions between customary and metropolitan law around gender justice and sexual freedoms, the article settles comfortably on description, and avoids sourcing or investigating the charged views around the subject.

The October 16 edition testifies to the paper's general uneven-ness of sexuality coverage, since it contains no stories at all on any of these subjects. In contrast, the November 13 edition is the only one selected which gives front-page prominence to a sex rights story. Even this is compromised, however, since the front page story is actually headlined “Zuma toes the line”, and a rape story which actually appears on page 5 is only advertized on the front page. Headlined “Girl (14) pregnant by man 66”, the story acknowledges sexual violence within the context of the broader justice issues that are generally and forthrightly covered by the newspaper. The story is accompanied by two images, one of the rapist behind bars, and another (obscured) of the raped girl. It is a well-researched story, and describes the background to the rape in relation to the girl's sexual and economic exploitation when she was made to do domestic work for the man who raped her. The rapist is quoted once, while the young girl is quoted frequently, and commentary is provided by the journalist.

In the same edition of the newspaper, another outspoken story on gender-based violence is headlined, “CGE blasts misuse of women in ads”. The story describes the Commission on Gender Equality's

findings about the mainstreaming of male sexual fantasies and women's objectification in South African advertising. It is accompanied by images graphically illustrating its main point, and gives a detailed account of the Commission's findings, and the sources it investigated. Curiously contradicting some of the views expressed in this newspaper's columns on “post-feminist” sex freedoms, this article is also important in covering media complicity with rights issues. It is the only article found which deals with the mass media's role in promoting or naturalizing the violation of groups' sexual and bodily integrity rights.

Also in contrast to the relative silence around sexuality issues in the editions reviewed earlier in the year, the December 4 edition provides an unexpected focus on violence against women in two reports in the main news section. On page 4, a story called “Help for abused girls delayed”, deals with the weakness of police services, health care, counselling and court systems in relation to the sexual abuse of 52 schoolgirls. On the opposite page is a suggestively connected story of a woman teacher facing charges of defamation after accusing the principal of her Pretoria school of abusing his pupils. But the story is poorly covered: little attention is given to the testimony of the woman, and the story focuses on the principal as a source. By quoting him, especially towards the end, as saying the woman teacher attacked him to disguise her incompetence, the story implicitly discredits her account. The account of court procedure also indicates the limited attention paid to investigation for this story, and reported events are based mainly on the journalist's account of court processes.

The December 4 edition goes on to cover HIV/AIDS in a report documenting a prominent Human Sciences Research Council study of AIDS. A large picture of Dr Olive Sishana, the main HSRC investigator for the study accompanies the story. This reinforces the impression, also evident in content, that the article is primarily a description of the report, rather than an investigation of its implications. The December 4 edition also covers homosexuality, infrequently covered in *City Press*. Interestingly, the context dealt with is not South Africa. Appearing on page 25, this short article deals with the Malawi government's proposals for the death penalty for homosexuals alongside “other sex offenders”. It also refers to the challenges facing gay struggles in Malawi.

### **3.3.3 Dominant Trends in *City Press***

*City Press* is evidently a populist newspaper shaped by an editorial policy of squarely addressing



ongoing inequalities and injustices in the post-apartheid South Africa. But its coverage of sex, sexual rights and sexual health issues is often erratic, contradictory and even conservative. In the newspapers selected, gender-based violence, sexual rights and sexual health struggles are rarely connected to broader national rights issues. There is often overt contradiction in the editorial policy around gender justice and sexual rights issues. For example, columns occasionally flout rights to gender justice and sexual freedoms, while certain articles emphatically support these rights, or tell stories which implicitly endorse the need for these rights.

This reveals the difficulty of accommodating sex and sex rights, issues long defined as personal, domestic and a-political, into a well-established tradition of public political issues - related to class, race, economic exploitation and political domination. As a newspaper targeting the black working class as the most marginalized group in society, *City Press* has a long history of protest. Yet its vacillating coverage of sexuality issues reveals a troubled acceptance of new sexual rights issues for a new democratizing agenda. This struggle can also be explained by bearing in mind that many of the newspaper's readers, familiar with a particular discourse of struggle, believe that struggles around sexuality and sexual rights are primarily the indulgent concerns of groups who do not face challenges of unemployment, homelessness, the legacy of racism and economic exploitation.

The newspaper has responded to the challenge of making sex issues part of the justice and rights agenda by creating platforms for such talk. Overall limitations and inconsistencies remain, however. The revolutionizing of the back page to “get the nation thinking about sexuality issues” is in some ways a superficial response to the deeper challenges of addressing entrenched taboos and silences. These include links between gendered power and sexual identities and behaviour, ways in which particular sexual practices and struggles defy “tradition”, and “sacrosanct” institutions and relationships in both the domestic and the public domains. The range of the newspaper's responses to sexuality is promising, and indicates a move towards acknowledging evolving public debates and rights demands and struggles. Yet it is also revealing that particular rights struggles and perspectives are consistently sidelined.

### **3.4. *Business Day***

Under Apartheid, newspapers such as the *Mail & Guardian* were clearly identified as radical and subversive. In contrast, *Business Day*, as a financial newspaper was rarely the target of state censorship. Yet many readers relied on the newspaper for frank coverage of political events. The newspaper's accountability to investors and business meant that it had a responsibility to provide informed political reporting in the interests of making sound financial and business sense. The economic (and fairly rigorous) approach to social issues remains a feature of *Business Day* coverage since 1994. As shown in what follows, it has also led to social issues being covered in largely abstract and dispassionate ways.

### **3.4.1 Gender-Based Violence**

Between July and December of 2005, *Business Day* rarely dealt with rape beyond the Zuma rape allegation. Coverage of this allegation also focused on the political implications of an accusation of criminal misconduct against the country's former Deputy President, rather than on gender rights. Poppie Mphuthing's short 2-column article in the 7 December edition, entitled "Charge sends strong message to activists" is the only forthright comment on the implications of the charge for gender justice. Citing a prominent women's rights activist, the column highlights the fact that the charge coincided with the 16 days of activism against violence campaign.

The newspaper's efforts to situate particular processes in the context of the country's broader politics also surfaced in its response to the Zuma rape allegation. These responses appear in editorials on consecutive days, 15 November and 16 November. *Business Day's* editorial of 16 November responds to the rape charge by dealing with media ethics and focusing on the risks taken by the *Sunday Times*. Claiming that the *Sunday Times* had a responsibility to cover the story, it also deals with the legal implications of media coverage of a sphere defined as sacred; the editorial states that a clause in the Criminal Procedure Act prohibits the publication of names of victim and perpetrator prior to trial. Striving to provide a balanced reflection of both ethics and legality, the editorial ultimately endorses the right of the *Sunday Times* to make the public aware of facts. Overall, therefore, the editorial exemplifies the newspaper's commitment to freedom of speech in the interests of formal democracy. The editorial does not adopt an emphatic social justice orientation, as is the case with *City Press*. Instead it favours a voice of reason which implicitly affirms the value of rights and justice around sex and sexuality.

The editorial for the previous day, 15 November, was headlined, “Politics and Rape” and explicitly raises the trickiness of a rape allegation in relation to Zuma's position in ANC party politics. An article written by Anton Harber, the former editor of the *Mail & Guardian*, pursues this line of argument further. Headlined “Sunday papers all fall short on Zuma rape story” and published on 16 November, the article stresses that the accusation was made and reported on in the context of bitter political rivalry, with certain factions having an interest in discrediting Jacob Zuma. The argument here largely echoes characteristic ways in which *Business Day* favours coverage of overall contextual and political implications, and veers away from detail and sensation.

A fairly prominent report on page 6 of the 14 September edition is revealing about the newspaper's efforts to integrate sexual rights and health issues with mainstream topics. The report, titled “One of many teachers found guilty of rape” raises the implications of the high incidence of rape perpetrated by teachers against girl pupils. Written by the education correspondent, the story illustrates how a particular sexual rights story can be integrated into broader commentary on a particular sector. The story deals with a Vanderbilt Park schoolteacher found guilty of rape, and uses this as an illustration of trends in South Africa. Quoting Human Rights Watch statistics, a Human Rights Research Council study, the South African Democratic Teachers' Union and the Education Department, the article provides comprehensive sources and contextualization for a particular story of injustice. In describing the teacher's being fined and made to seek counselling by a professional body, it also exposes the absence of adequate mechanisms for addressing alarming patterns in South African schools.

### **3.4.2 HIV/AIDS**

In contrast to many other newspapers, *Business Day* does not have provide regular HIV/AIDS coverage. But it does provide fairly comprehensive coverage of official and dominant South African responses to HIV/AIDS. It covered the reaction of one of the opposition parties, “DA slams ANC for failing to contain HIV infection” (2 December); the government's response, “SA Fails to protect children from HIV” (30 November) and “HIV infects 5, 2 million South Africans”, (29 November).

A story headlined “HIV/AIDS costs gold-mining giants 7, 5% of payroll” on 15 November explicitly raises the connections between business and financial interest and sexual health. Dealing with the Gold

Fields Mining Company, which provides workers with antiretrovirals, the story draws attention to the responsibility shown by certain commercial sectors in addressing AIDS. Generally, therefore, *Business Day* has frankly addressed the political and economic implications of HIV/AIDS in South Africa. The overall emphasis has been on critically assessing actors and sectors that neglect how the disease affects development. The newspaper's coverage of HIV/AIDS reveals its self-defined role as a forum for influencing public opinion, but within a framework that assumes the public should be exposed to sober facts.

### **3.4.3 Sex Rights and Bodily Integrity**

*Business Day's* limited coverage of miscellaneous sex topics and of gay and lesbian rights struggles reveals a shying away from topics that cannot be explicitly linked to mainstream public processes. Unlike the *Sunday Times* and the *Mail & Guardian*, *Business Day* does not provide a platform for prominent spokespersons of marginalized groups' sex or bodily integrity rights. Instead, as is the case with its approach to the Zuma rape allegation, it adopts a tone of editorial reason in relation to public debate. In response to the constitutional court's ruling, the editorial titled "Love and Marriage" focuses on the irony of South Africa's being one of only five countries to legalize gay marriage. The editorial dwells on the gap between legal and social acceptance, and claims that South Africa still has far to go in fully recognizing the equality of gays and lesbians.

An article published on 2 December headlined "Gay marriages make the legal altar in SA" is very similar in tone and orientation. Reviewing a history of court battles for gays and lesbians, it quotes Judge Albie Sachs of the Constitutional Court in support of the ruling.

This prominent article and the editorial indicate a clear stand in support of those whose sexual rights are discredited by prejudice. But the newspaper has also adopted a fairly sober and "non-partisan" approach to sexual rights issues. Largely avoiding organizations and others' personal views, it affirms justice largely through the logical and judicious reasoning that has for many years been integral to the image of the newspaper.

Also noteworthy is the newspaper's relative neglect of activists' voices. Coverage of gender justice in *City Press*, the *Mail & Guardian* and the *Sunday Times* indicates that spaces are provided - albeit

erratically or minimally - for feminist and gay activists' commentary and analysis. As its coverage of gender-based violence indicates, *Business Day* has clearly not excluded gender and sexuality from its exploration of social justice. Yet it pays far less attention to gender analysis than other newspapers do. And its exploration of rights for women affected by violence seems to be rooted in a general liberal model of rights, rather than a recognition of gender justice and power relations. *Business Day* assumes an opinion-shaping mandate in its coverage of rights and justice issues. But its voice of reason around justice is a fairly abstract and non-partisan one. This perpetuates and serves its traditional image as a newspaper untainted by partisan politics and dedicated “purely” to financial and business concerns.

### **3. 4. 4 Dominant Trends in *Business Day***

*Business Day* shows a concern with connecting sexual rights and justice issues to its coverage of national political and economic processes. Shaped by an editorial policy that links sound economics to political insight, its coverage of sex and sexuality is often relatively more mainstreamed than is the case with other newspapers. There is generally an avoidance of coverage that is heavily personal, or of the emotion, passion and intensity that sexuality discourses are often linked to.

The financial orientation of the newspaper also leads to the sidelining of sex and sexuality issues that have less direct or obvious relevance to policy-related, social stability, governance and economic issues. It is therefore noteworthy that *Business Day*, in comparison with other dailies, rarely covers stories of particular rape cases, for example. Nor does it provide space for maverick or taboo-breaking coverage of sex and sexuality. It does, however, dwell on legislative and social processes linked to sex rights and sexual health issues. The orientation of *Business Day* therefore contrasts significantly with the populist orientation of *City Press*, which squarely prioritizes social justice as an end in itself. On one level, then, *Business Day* coverage reveals an opinion-moulding role for the newspaper. On another level, coverage of legislation, rights struggles and civil society action takes the form of soberly appraising trends. The attention to investigation and explanation is important. But rights related to sexuality tend to be covered in technical terms. There is therefore a preponderant focus on sex and sexuality topics with clear human resource and social stability implications, and a neglect of cases and topics which do not make these clear.

### 3. 5. The *Daily Voice*

Conforming to the format and tone of the well-known British tabloid, the *Sun*, the *Daily Voice* is self-defined as a newspaper devoted to “sex, scandal, skinner [gossip] and sport”. Like other tabloids and magazines in this genre, it inundates the reader with images and text conveying violence, intrigue, and sex. It therefore prioritizes very different journalistic objectives from the other newspapers reviewed. It also makes no pretensions to adhering to professional journalistic standards. Moreover, it is not a national newspaper; it appeals to a very specific audience in a particular region, the Western Cape.

The language used in the newspaper is therefore also distinctive. Although the *Voice* is technically an English-language newspaper, it frequently uses code-switching, with headlines and sections of stories incorporating the mixture of English and Afrikaans spoken by many lower-income members of the Western Cape population. Front-page news between July and December of 2005 was therefore wholly out of sync with front page news for other newspapers. Between July and December of 2005, *Daily Voice* headlines concerned such subjects as local pop stars, the assault of a young woman by her boyfriend, drug abuse in Cape Town's lower-income areas, a Cape Town policeman's assault on his girlfriend, a Satanist accused of murdering a church caretaker and a man's defence of his family from attack.

These stories are emphatically personal and localized. They immerse the reader in the immediacy of the present with very little follow-up, investigation or contextual discussion. The main aim is to shock and titillate. It is clear that immediacy and detail in reporting can have the effect of alerting readers to everyday justice issues. Coverage of social injustices in *City Press* exemplifies this. But the *Voice* dwells on details without any suggestion of their implications. Consequently, it often presents “trivia” as news. This orientation is strongly evident in a prominent story on page 9 of the November 10 edition. Subtitled “Droeg en Kroes”, (“Dry and Frizzy”). The story, featured as an “exclusive”, is about a woman's abortive visit to a head-dressing salon. It deals with the way an upmarket salon left a woman with very dry and frizzy hair. The story is padded with long descriptions of the woman's desperate desire for a hair-do, her confinement to a wheelchair, and her impoverishment. Random details for engaging the reader are therefore amassed with very little attention being paid to standard journalistic ideas about newsworthiness. In fact, the conventions that the newspaper enlists are often those of fiction-writing.

The escapist emphasis characteristic of fiction is strongly evident in the second page of each edition of the newspaper. This page features pictures of bare-breasted women, accompanied with brief biographical write-ups. Echoing the content of soft-porn magazines, the newspaper clearly defines its target audience in terms of a “male gaze”. The reader is defined as an indiscriminating consumer of dominant media images and messages.

### **3.5.1 Gender-Based Violence in the *Voice***

On average, the *Daily Voice* covers rape and sexual assault at least once for each edition. The tone of this coverage varies according to which angle the reporter finds best suited to entertaining readers. For example, The November 3 edition focuses on the plight of a school principal accused of rape. Headlined “Sex Charge Crushed Me”, the story briefly outlines the history of the charge of sexual assault, the principal's appeal against this, and his eventual reinstatement following an eight-month investigation. The dominant emphasis, however, is the testimony of the principal. His photograph appears at the top of the article, and subtitles such as “Distraught” and “Cleared” help to focus the reader's attention on his frequently quoted distress about the accusation.

In contrast is another prominent story, appearing on page 4 and spread across two pages with a number of photographs. Headlined “Bruiser in Blue”, the story focuses on a senior police officer accused of repeatedly assaulting his girlfriend. The story is reported from the complainant's point of view, and captures her perspective through subtitles like “Stupid” (referring to the way she has seen herself for tolerating abuse”), and “Slapped”. The story quotes her extensively, and provides detailed accounts of particular incidents of assault. Among the four photographs accompanying this story is a very large one of the complainant displaying bruises on her arms.

Another story, covered on 1 December, is headlined “Hunting a Killer” and is spread across two full pages. At face value it seems to be more typical of the news covered in mainstream newspapers. Rather than dealing with trivia or a particular incident, it focuses on a spate of murders and rapes, and shows evidence of some investigation and follow-up. But the story focuses on the mystery surrounding the case. It deals with the fact that the victims all have biblical names, and dwells on minutiae about murder weapons and the killer's strategy. The speculations of members of the farming community are the

primary source for the story. And ultimately it shores up numerous threads reinforcing the bizarreness of the murders and rapes. This emphasis on the bizarre is explicit in subtitles such as “gruesome,” “crazed” and “task team”. Focusing on ingredients typical of a fictional murder story, (the enormity of the crime, the elusiveness of the perpetrator and the challenges for detection), the story is clearly geared towards thrilling the reader.

A story headlined “The Pick Axe Wives” in the December 15 edition is very similar. Accompanied by five graphic pictures of battered women, the story deals with two women abused by their partners. Although the story refers to the way the court freed their partners, and obliquely promises evidence of balanced investigation, the story is ultimately a sensation story. There is no follow-up of sources, and no indication that the reporter actually attended any court cases. The story's content is provided mainly by the testimony of the two battered women. These, like the three photographs on the cover page, and the four in the main story on pages 4 and 5, appeal mainly to a voyeuristic curiosity about others' suffering.

Another story in the December 9 edition provides another angle on coverage of violence against women. Headlined “Smashed in Gympie”, the story, spread across pages 12 and 13, deals with gangsters who daily attack at least five women. As is the case with other stories of sexual assault, the story is accompanied with numerous pictures. These capture the name of the street where the gangsters usually attack, windows smashed by the gangsters, and a (presumably) posed picture of a man about to fling a brick. Like the *Voice's* other stories on sexual violence, this coverage is primarily concerned with graphic images and narrative details with the force to shock and thrill readers.

The conflation of stories of sexual assault and violence against women with entertainment is evident in the way that these stories are cast under the broad sensationalist rubric of “crime”. Uncovering what is violent, frightening and threatening is the main purpose of these stories. And it is this purpose that leads to the weird shifts in perspective - ranging from the prioritizing of victims to the exonerating of culprits.

### **3.5.2 Jettisoning rights and health issues**

The *Daily Voice* covers HIV/AIDS mainly in relation to bolstering the sensation value of stories whose



primary focus is sex or violence. It is revealing that the only reference to HIV/AIDs on World Aids is in the context of publicizing television viewing for the day. On page 11 of the December 1 edition, the *Voice* TV guide announces that “Today is World Aids Day” and follows this with an account of various television programmes. Buried under the discussion of films and TV series on this page is a small column listing what readers can do to support World Aids day. Suggestions range from “getting tested” and “raising awareness in your community” to “using your imagination” and “selling red ribbons”. The article is ultimately a very glib concession to the newspaper's social responsibility. The *Voice* appears to be making only a token and superficial acknowledgement that HIV and AIDS are huge challenges for South Africans, and that newspapers have an enormous role to play in raising awareness.

Despite the South African Constitutional Court's ruling about recognizing gay partnerships in December 2005, there was no coverage of same sex rights or issues during that month. And this again distinguishes the orientation of the newspaper from that of others reviewed. Sex rights during December became a national media issue, with newspapers and many television programmes focusing on legislative developments with public consequences. This marginalizing of a central national topic by the *Voice* is also evident in the newspaper's avoidance of coverage of the Zuma rape allegation. A small column on page 2 of the December 9 edition was titled “No Rape Funds in Friends”, and deals with the fact that Zuma's trial would not be funded by the “Friends of JZ” Trust.

Overall, the orientation of the newspaper is emphatically parochial. Subjects dealt with are drug-related sagas in a city notorious for drug abuse; stories of intrigue often concerning prominent figures in various small communities in Cape Town; and coverage of local instances of violence and crime. There is in fact a tacit admission that what will interest the newspaper's readers are *not* national or political events, but parochial and sensationalist topics.

Yet the prioritizing of entertainment can have ambiguous effects. In the pursuit of entertainment and sensation, newspapers such as the *Voice* cover topics which mainstream papers ignore. Such coverage might be prompted only by the newspaper's commercial goal of shocking and entertaining readers. At the same time, the effect is to bring issues to public attention which might otherwise remain unpublicized. It is therefore clear that tabloids such as the *Daily Voice* have the potential to function as important moulders of opinion and forums for exposing injustice. But factors such as market

imperatives; the politics and knowledge of individual journalists; and the leeway and ability of editors to define accountable roles for their newspapers will always shape this potential.

### **3.5.3 Miscellaneous Coverage**

One of the main reasons for the high sales figures for the *Voice* is its regular photographs of bare-breasted women on page three. Under Apartheid, images of bare-breasted women were censored. The relaxation of this censorship has been exploited mainly by popular magazines targeting men, and by the film industry. While newspapers are now free to publish pictures of naked women, few actually regularly do so. Even the *Sunday Times* back page girl usually wears a swimming costume. And it seems that most newspapers are acknowledging both traditional taboos about nakedness, as well as feminist objections to the media objectification of women's bodies. In character with its broader tendency to titillate and entertain, the *Voice* goes against the grain in regularly publishing pictures and poses generally found in the entertainment media.

The main forum for miscellaneous sex issues coverage in the *Voice* is “Sex Talk”, a regular page in which a “Doctor Angela Brokman” responds to queries about letter-writers' sex experiences and problems. This page does not really seem concerned with addressing entrenched South African taboos. It is therefore qualitatively different from *City Press's* sex columns, which appear to support certain national efforts to take up national debates and concerns around sexuality. *The Voice's* letters and responses could come from one of many similar regulars in magazines and newspapers around the world. They include a request for advice from a pregnant woman who discovers that she is attracted to another woman, and the declaration of a woman who claims to have become sexually insatiable since her first sexual experience at the age of twenty-one. The letters generally have a confessional tone, as though the letter-writers were publicly owning up to various forms of perversion.

Overall, the effect of the letters is to contribute to the newspaper's general shock value. Readers are able to participate vicariously in others sexual intrigues and behaviour. The judicious responses of Doctor Angela Brokman reassures both letter-writers and readers about sex and sexuality. And the media platform for communicating about sex also appears to help destigmatize the subject. But the letters chosen actually often reinforce stereotypes and taboos. The impact of many of the letters is to publicize examples of oddities or peculiarity. For example, a letter written by a pregnant woman who is

“pregnant but...may be a lesbian” is accompanied by a large picture, typical of those in many soft-porn magazines, of two women kissing. This redefines the letter as a shocking instance of illicit sexual behaviour, and the reader ends up “othering” the subject, and indeed other subjects on the page, as examples of sexual pathology.

Through the “Sex Talk” page, the *Voice* also undertakes to find people partners through a “risk free” communicative system in which the newspaper coordinates the exchange, until the two communicators choose to divulge their contact details to each other. This media-controlled dating is another commercial approach to sex and intimacy. Like the classified advertisements of certain newspapers and magazines, the newspaper coordinates dating in terms of very commercialized, formulaic and hetero-normative ideas about sexual relationships.

Other miscellaneous coverage of sexuality include trivia stories ranging from the macabre to the humorous. An example of this is a November 6 story about a stripper whose breast caught alight during her performance. This kind of ad-hoc coverage of sex and sexuality is a clear indication of the extent to which the *Voice* capitalizes on the way “sex sells”.

Exploring the paper's coverage of miscellaneous sex and sexuality issues would not be complete without attention to its use of images. It is noteworthy that the paper frequently uses pictures of white models, both for the “soft-porn” page three and for illustrating letters for the “Sex Talk” section. Pictures and biographies of models for page three are often sourced from other Northern-based publications. Between November and December, they included a model from the Czech Republic, a Milan-based model hailing from Moscow, and a well-known Playboy bunny-girl. The newspaper occasionally invites local models to pose for page three, but these are few and far between. Photographs for illustrating letters on the “Sex Talk” page are from various media sources; the racial, class and geographical realities of the *Voice* readers are dramatically different from its generally white and glamourized body and sex images. This indicates the newspaper's almost slavish adherence to dominant norms about bodies and sexuality, and its lack of accountability to its audience. The newspaper centralizes white, youthful, affluent and glamourized images of sexual and bodily worth which are wholly out of sync with those of its predominant black (“coloured”) working-class readers.

### 3. 5. 4 Dominant Trends in *The Voice*

The *Voice* regularly sensationalizes the subjects of sex and crime, and echoes a globalized mass media sensationalizing of sex and violence. Never using investigation or balanced reporting, the paper is concerned merely with breaking stories of scandal and sensation, and assumes that it has a guaranteed audience for such coverage. Using the conventions of sensationalism established in soft-sell tabloid publications in Britain and the United States, the newspaper demonstrates the power of globalized norms in governing “popular” mass media consumption and content. The paper uses graphic and lurid images and headlines to shock, titillate or entertain readers whose tastes are shaped by hegemonic norms of gender and sexuality.

Stories related to sex rights or gender-based violence are therefore abstracted from a political or moral context. The stories are explicitly “escapist” in discouraging readers' critical reflection on politics, ethics or justice, even though they minutely probe subjects' real lives. They are situated in a value system where the curiosity about sexual behaviour and practices, the objectification of women, or the centralizing of male sexual fantasy, are part of a dominant repertoire of hegemonic messages about gender and sexuality. The newspaper therefore echoes messages in popular South magazines such as *You*, or American and English magazines marketed in South Africa. The prominence of images reinforces this trend. Images and short, vivid stories are stressed at the expense of reflection and insight, and the newspaper makes it clear that its main concern is with the surface sensationalism of its messages.

The popularity of this newspaper indicates a huge public demand for sensation, scandal and violence. Easily read and digested, the newspaper is often more frequently sold along the road than are mainstream dailies such as the *Cape Argus*, or the national newspaper, the *Sunday Times*. It is also noteworthy that this newspaper's messages about sex and sexuality overtly contradict the emphasis on rights in many others. The relative paucity of coverage of gender-based violence stories in newspapers reviewed has been noted. It would seem that stories of rape and gender-based violence are rendered commonplace or mundane by media agendas which attach far greater importance to mainstream ideas about stories' newsworthiness. There is clear gender discrimination here. But it is also important to consider the extent to which gender-based violence reporting can become bogged down in conventions of sensationalism and scandal. *The Voice's* heavy focus on gender violence stories as sensation stories

is testimony of this. This casting of rape and gender violence coverage has possibly led other newspapers to consolidate their difference and to avoid these sensationalized areas. Contrasting patterns in the media treatment of gender-based violence therefore reveal ways in which divergent media conventions lead different newspapers to market themselves and select appropriate topics.

Of importance too is the rate of growth of soft-sell tabloids. The introduction of the genre in South Africa began with an Afrikaans-language newspaper explicitly based on Britain's *Sun* (*Die Son*). *The Voice* followed soon after, and the recent English equivalent of *Die Son* is currently posed to challenge the sway of the English-language *Voice*. As more and more newspapers exploit an environment of freedom of speech, the competition to outdo each other in sensationalizing is likely to increase. Ethical and political standards in such newspapers are therefore likely to be compromised more and more. The over-riding sway of commercial agendas, which exploit and reinforce dominant images and mindsets around sexuality and gender, can therefore easily undermine a broader environment in which freedom of speech has been aimed to guarantee all groups' rights and freedoms.

It is important to critique the commercial and male-centred character of soft-sell publications which are rapidly becoming a global media phenomenon. At the same time, it is necessary to speculate about how, despite their marketing intentions, they provide moments or spaces for the populist coverage of taboo or marginalized issues. It is worth noting that much of South Africa's alternative press during the anti-apartheid struggle took the form of low-budget tabloids with strongly localized content. Tabloids in the present context are produced and distributed with the main purpose of selling sex, scandal and sensation. Yet their local appeal, coupled with the silences they occasionally open up, indicate their potential to initiate relevant, topical and accessible coverage. Herman Manson, editor of Media Toolbox, acknowledges this in his response to a tragic story in 2005: the tabloid coverage of a church minister's homosexual relationship culminating in the suicide of his partner. Condemning the tabloid's lack of ethics and responsibility, Manson states:

We all accept that tabloids will continue to launch and grow in this country. But instead of copying and pasting from the sick British model, why aren't local tabloid owners brave enough to embrace the spirit of our democracy? Why not accept that you can publish a tabloid without

sacrificing your sense of social responsibility or the humanity of those you report on, and dare I suggest, that of your writers and editors?

(<http://www.mediatoolbox.co.za/pebble.asp?relid=3325>)

## **4. Overview of Main Findings**

### **4.1 Evaluating Sex/Sexuality/ Sex Rights and Health Coverage**

In the broadsheet newspapers, the *Sunday Times*, *Business Day* and *City Press*, few sexuality-related stories made it to the top of the front page. This indicates that none of these newspapers deemed the subjects of gender-based violence or sex rights struggles worthy of public commentary. This is the case despite the fact that crucial moves around legislative reform and rights struggles occurred in the second half of 2005. The exception is the rape allegation against former deputy president Jacob Zuma.

Yet the quantitative coverage of sex and sexuality issues is important. And the range of topics and perspectives, particularly those that are generally silenced, also indicates the media's responsiveness to a wide range of opinions and processes. But the treatment of these topics and voices, and the ways in which they are contextualized or framed are crucial.

One way of exploring this framing is by examining orientations towards sexuality coverage. Nadira Omarjee identifies the following four categories for distinguishing gender-based violence stories by exploring their effects in the following ways. These categories also usefully define different approaches to coverage of sex and sexuality issues generally:

- trivializing;
- sensationalizing;
- providing purportedly neutral coverage;
- providing sensitively written and well-balanced coverage.

#### **4.1.1 Trivializing**

Unlike such subjects as government, the economy and politics, the topics of sex and sexuality are easily reduced to “soft” human interest coverage. Even when sex and sexuality topics may directly raise political issues, or are connected to “hard” topics such as government, they can be marginalized through rhetorical strategies or uses of tone which work to water down their seriousness. Coverage of gender-based violence coverage exemplifies this. Stories are often seen mainly as cases of individuals' misadventures or intrigues, instead of being seen as illustrating social problems. Such trivializing effects can also be seen in coverage of sex rights struggles.

While coverage of HIV/AIDS as a global health threat is far less amenable to trivialization, it is noteworthy that the trend towards quantification in reporting often sidelines commentary or analysis that have been crucial to struggles for health rights in South Africa. Quantitatively, there has recently been much coverage of HIV/AIDS in newspapers such as the *Sunday Times* or *City Press* or the *Mail & Guardian's* regular monitoring mechanisms. But the emphasis on individual narratives, or on statistical surveys pigeon-holes these stories as quantitative rather than qualitative. With the exception of *Business Day* and the *Mail & Guardian*, newspapers pay inadequate attention to the animated debates and controversies around HIV/AIDS activism, or around controversial government statements on AIDS and its treatment. It is these latter interpretive and politically charged patterns that convey the main social dynamics around HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

#### **4.1.2 Sensationalizing**

The sensationalizing of sex and sexuality issues is directly connected to its trivialization; melodramatic stories of rape or around sex rights deprives these stories of their political or social substance. Spectacular incidents are cast in terms of generalized and formulaic scandal, the scandal that a dominant culture almost compulsively links to sex and the body. While sensationalizing is obvious in tabloids such as the *Voice*, it also influences certain coverage in the mainstream newspapers which generally adhere to standards of professional and ethical reporting. As revealed in the *Sunday Times'* coverage of the Jacob Zuma rape allegation, this newspaper compromised a number of ethical and legal considerations in the interests of breaking a story.

The commercial imperatives that drive newspapers' coverage is important in explaining this. Also

important is the competitive ethos of media reporting. This can lead both reporters and newspapers to cover stories without due regard to the principles and ethics which journalism formally entails. It is noteworthy that young reporters enter a field where a sense of urgency or competitiveness can lead to the sidelining of other principles associated with their professional development. Since sex, sexuality and body image are easily associated with effective selling, it is not surprising that newspapers and journalists so easily compromise responsible and ethical journalism in favour of the lucrative route of sensation.

#### **4.1.3.Purportedly neutral coverage**

Sensitively written and balanced accounts of sex and sexuality are few and far between. But newspapers frequently use conventions of purportedly neutral and objective reporting, especially in the case of rape. Here the range of sources used, as well as the sympathy towards survivors, often create an impression of balanced reporting. At the same time, the covert operation of discourses undermining insight into power becomes important. For example, it was revealing how, in the case of coverage of rape allegations against Jacob Zuma, many newspapers entirely ignored the complainant as a source, even when it was possible to access her testimony indirectly. This is a general reflection of ways in which the media routinely erases women's voices, turning women into shadowy ciphers who simply “feature” within others' narratives, even when these are broadly pro-survivor.

It is also noteworthy that much “balanced reporting” tends towards a moralistic appraisal of individual behaviour, rather than towards analyzing entrenched social identities and practices. In coverage of gender violence and sexual rights, therefore, “balance” is often created through critiquing individuals' behaviour or prejudice, rather than through addressing how such behaviour is rooted in social institutions and relationships. It is mainly in opinions and insights coverage, provided by prominent activists or spokespersons on women's, gay, or AIDS survivors' rights, that South African newspapers open up spaces for critical reflections on the power relations underpinning individuals' violation of or resistance to others' rights.

#### **4.1.4 Sensitively Written and balanced coverage**



Sustaining sensitively-written and balanced accounts on sex and sexuality in media reporting poses enormous challenges. This is because of the deeply ingrained and covert assumptions and misconceptions that surround sex and sexuality. In other words, few reports fail to betray homophobia, male bias and gender stereotyping, or simply general anxiety about sex and sexuality as taboo subjects. Sensitively-written and balanced accounts are usually those written by non-editorial staff in “Opinions” sections that are peripheral to the main news sections of newspapers. In other words, it is often only writers who are *not* editorial staff and who have been involved in activism and around sexual rights/health who provide accounts that cut through many of the silences or misconceptions of staff reporters. While the latter might be experienced in addressing mainstream topics, such as government, education, or the economy, they fail to deal with sex and sexuality topics with the same ease, professionalism, candour or rigour. Generally, then, a history of shrouding sex and sexuality in taboo, silence and myth-making has meant that journalists are ill-equipped to write sensitively about sex and sexuality topics, even though these often prove to be so central to the coverage of important news.

#### **4.2 Factors Influencing Sex/Sex Rights Coverage in South Africa**

Writing in 1998, Lisa Vetten describes the “schizophrenic” response of the media to rape. She argues that the focus, albeit often laudable, on uncovering violence against women often co-exists uneasily with a tendency to underplay its political implications. This general contradiction frequently characterizes media reporting on sex, sexual rights and sexual health more generally. The “schizophrenic” response is symptomatic of South Africa's tumultuous political processes, where individual and group struggles, experimental cultural expression and far-reaching law reform are placing tremendous pressure on the media to transform, and to respond to long-suppressed ideas and identities.

The challenges are so considerable because sexuality impinges on numerous aspects of domestic, social and institutional life. Sexuality discourses are connected to cultural, legal, ethical and political affairs, and clearly straddle both private and public spheres. Consequently, sexuality issues provide evidence of these wide-ranging areas. In general terms, the South African media's response to this vast range of evidence has been receptive, and it has facilitated and reflected emerging ideas.

But there have also been many contradictions, hesitations and complexities within this explosion. What follows examines the key forces within which South African newspaper coverage operates: the state and the law, commercial interests; globalization and hegemonic standardization; and dominant “popular” discourses.

#### **4.2.1 The State and the Law**

It seems anomalous to identify the state as an impediment to press freedom on sex and sexuality in South Africa. South Africa has a democratic government and liberal constitution which allow for considerable freedoms around the expression of sex and sexuality issues. Certainly, the State has not set in place censorship laws which restrict what may be said; nor does it regulate sexual behaviour and rights (such as the Apartheid Government's Immorality Act, or certain governments' legislation against homosexuality). The South African media is therefore not overtly “restricted” by state laws in determining, for example, whether a gay rights activist can, without compromising a newspaper, write a newspaper article condemning homophobia.

At the same time, many state mechanisms actively regulate what the media reports and how the media reports on sex and sexuality. In fact, the main mechanism of state control over the media on an everyday basis is the law. As “private” matters, sex and sexuality are subjects whose treatment easily lays the media open to charges of libel. Laws for respecting individuals' personal rights cannot be flouted without newspapers facing serious consequences. This is especially true of high-profile figures whose prominence rests on their public reputation, and who can easily deploy economic, legal and political resources to defend their individual rights.

The media's constraints in relation to such figures was clearly demonstrated at the time that a rape charge was first laid against Jacob Zuma. The *Sunday Times*, which broke the story, was strongly attacked for unfounded reporting. A *Business Day* editorial reflected on the fact that the article contravened the Criminal Procedure Act by publishing the names of the complainant and accused before trial. And it is revealing that many newspapers covering the story between November and December of 2005, rather than following the *Sunday Times'* unearthing of unpublicized evidence, adopted a very cautious response. The *Mail & Guardian* report reflects this well. It alluded exclusively to coverage of the story in other newspapers for evidence, rather than referring to other sources.

There is in fact a significant albeit uncodified body of “laws” that directly and indirectly regulates what the media may say with respect to sex, sexuality and sex rights. In South Africa, these laws are often defined in terms of abstract moral and ethical codes regulated by state-independent bodies. However there are important connections between these, state apparatuses, business interests and legislation. In South Africa, the news media is regulated by the Press Ombudsman, the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa and the Broadcasting Complaints Commission.

Like the State, the media in democracies like South Africa is often superficially “free”. Newspapers have to carry the mantle of objectivity because their credibility rests on their not identifying with any sectional interest. As is the case with the state, the media is meant to serve the “public” interest. The difficulty arises when we consider that the public is not comprised of a group of equal individuals, with equivalent power and freedom to speak and be heard in the public sphere. It is comprised of groups with long histories of privilege and power defined and regulated with respect to gender, sexuality, sexual identity and sexuality discourses. In catering for “the public” interest, therefore, the media is not in a position to challenge ingrained hetero-normativity, for example, in cartoons, columns etc, since hetero-normativity is a dominant “public” norm. In short, a consideration of dominant “popular” discourses and how they are (often covertly) encoded in the media is often an important reflection of the laws that directly regulate the media.

At present, self-regulating media monitoring in South Africa seems to ensure considerable degrees of freedom. But there are no guarantees for the sanctity of these freedoms. A clause in the Film and Publications Act of 1996 exempts the news media from all regulation and censorship. Recently, however, the Ministry of Home Affairs has proposed that the media no longer be exempt. If this proposal is approved and the Amendment Bill is enacted, newspaper coverage of sex and sexual rights will be seriously affected. It is therefore noteworthy that the laws and processes guaranteeing press freedom, while impressive in the immediate post-apartheid period, are still open to contestation. If enacted, the recent Film and Publication Amendment Bill will dramatically alter the way newspapers respond to and enable sexuality and sex rights and health debates and struggles. This raises two implications for the media. On one level, the media can substantially contribute to civil society awareness of the threats posed to media freedoms and, more generally, the democratic circulation of

information. This is especially important where the Constitution guarantees South Africans the right to free access to information. On another level, it raises the importance of organizations and lobbying among media organizations.

### **4.2.3 Commercial Interests**

Newspapers survive by being sold. Newspapers operate in a commercial context, and in terms of their daily operations, they reflect the norms of commercial life. Newspapers rarely straightforwardly reflect the beliefs or values of owners or editors, whose ideals and goals often need to take second place to the imperative of financial survival. The imperative of selling newspapers can militate against the coverage of areas concerning groups perceived as having little buying or political power. Thus, coverage of South Africa's numerous rape and domestic violence cases involving poor and working-class women may be tacitly rationalized on the grounds that these are socially invisible figures about whom there is little readership interest: the populist newspaper *City Press* is the only weekly newspaper which covered stories about the sexual abuse of poor and working class women with any sort of regularity or thoroughness. In all the newspapers, there is, in contrast, tremendous interest in rape cases involving prominent men.

The *Sunday Times'* erratic coverage of rape in principled and sensitive ways exemplifies the way that commercial imperatives can over-ride other moral and political agendas for newspaper reporting. It has been shown that between July and December of 2005, the *Sunday Times* took a strong stand in condemning rape, in publicizing rape statistics, and in highlighting its status as a human rights abuse. And it is especially important that this emphasis surfaced in two editorials. But the newspaper has also been sharply attentive to the demand for popular commercial images and stories which are largely insensitive to the violation of particular groups' rights.

The power of commercial interests in the contemporary context is also linked to globalization and the consolidation of media oligarchies and corporations. Within these configurations of media ownership, editors' ideals can often be sidelined. *The Mail & Guardian* is a case in point. The appointment of Faerial Hafajee, a black woman, as editor in 2005 can easily be seen as marking the opening up of the media to radically different voices. Yet it cannot be assumed that Hafajee – who has a long record of protest reporting in the eighties, and is a firm advocate of women's rights – has the autonomy to

radically reshape the newspaper to accommodate voices that she feels have been excluded. The *Mail & Guardian* is currently in partnership with the *Guardian*, a British newspaper. And although the *Guardian* is also a left-wing newspaper, it too is subject to the commercialized networks – linked to political agendas – of all other prominent newspapers today.

Overall, therefore, commercial interests, both nationally and internationally, place considerable constraints on coverage of socially contentious and marginalized topics, irrespective of the ideals of editors. And when we consider that sex and sexuality related issues are generally feminized, these are the topics that end up being subordinated for the sake of guaranteeing financial viability. Gender-based violence affects mainly women, and sex rights, and sexual health issues are often feminized as soft issues, as opposed to areas such as commerce and the economy, government and politics, which are coded as masculine. Financial viability is powerfully linked to masculinized topics and fields, and is associated with public performance, business ventures, party politics and governance.

The pre-eminence of commercial interest can take a more blatant form. Soft-sell tabloids clearly compromise all pretense to accountable, balanced reporting in the drive to commoditize sex, violence and women's bodies. *The Voice* clearly reveals how the sensationalizing of sex, sexuality and violence against women can become mere commercialized items: their newsworthiness rests not on investigating processes that underlie or surround them, but on their fetishized dramatization in a world where they are subjects of mass consumption.

When a man killed himself after a tabloid claimed that he was gay and “promiscuous”, the editor of Media Toolbox, Herman Manson (2005), quoted various other media figures to argue that there are generally two sets of journalistic standards in South Africa. One is for mainstream media and prioritizes journalistic traditions and ethics; the other, applying to tabloids, assumes that all coverage is permissible in the interests of unearthing subjects' most private affairs. It is noteworthy that tabloids are owned by large companies which formally embrace standard journalistic traditions and codes of ethics. *The Voice* is owned by the largest newspaper group in South Africa, while the Afrikaans-language tabloid, *Die Son*, is owned by Media 24, which also publishes *City Press*, other mainstream newspapers, as well as a large variety of magazines. The absence of a single standard for guiding newspapers within companies indicates the salience that these companies attach to commercial success.

All this reveals the considerable financial pressures that are placed on individual newspapers; they are obliged to demonstrate their commercial viability in order to guarantee funding.

South Africa has had a long alternative press tradition. In contrast to donor support for South Africa in the eighties, current donor funding clearly assumes that there is no need to support an alternative media. Yet the limitations of existing tabloids indicates the viability of donor support for pro-active and communally responsive reporting.

#### **4.2.4 Globalization and hegemonic standards**

The growing prominence of soft-sell publications in an environment like South Africa clearly reveals the impact of hegemonic standards. Following Michel Foucault, many theorists working on sexuality and gender have pointed out that society's interest in sex and sexuality is far from a universal norm, but a fixation engendered by the obsession with sex and sexuality in Western discourses. The commercializing of sex and sexuality is a logical expression of the preoccupation, and has led increasingly to the mainstreaming of pornography in the media.

This mainstreaming of pornography often centralizes male sexual fantasies in very stark ways. In *the Voice* for example, stories of violence against women are mediated by perspectives bordering on fascination. In this case, there is often very little to distinguish the content and effects of the *news* media from the *entertainment* media (for example, magazines, videos and films). The main purpose of both is to ensure profits by pandering to a cultivated public taste for sex as violent, scandalous and usually misogynistic spectacle.

But the globalization of standards can take other forms. It is evident when, for example, newspapers diligently conform to conventions of professional journalistic reporting and so marginalize subjects or approaches conventionally associated with non-prestigious traditions or newspapers. This report has dealt with the example of the under-reporting of rape in *The Mail & Guardian*, and it seems important to refer to this example here again. Stories of rape, and more generally of sex, sexuality and sexual rights often fall too uncomfortably into the category of human interest, misadventure, entertainment, or lifestyle.

Global media conventions are not always those that are hegemonic and stereotypical. They can be awesome, impressive and persuasive. Very often, these can work to persuade editors that particular ways of representing the news are not sufficiently “respectable”. Newspapers, eager to maintain an image of professionalism, will veer away from certain subjects and focus mainly on the respectable areas of politics, government and commerce instead. This embarrassment about sex and sexuality issues surfaces in the case of the *Sunday Times*' trivializing of the protest against the Children's Bill, where the bared buttocks of protesters became a target of humour, while the essence of the story, the Children's Bill and opposition to it, was flagrantly sidelined. In such cases it might appear as if an individual photographer's or editor's off-beat humour has somehow been accommodated. But this humour, ultimately displaced anxiety about sexuality, should be seen as symptomatic of a wider social embarrassment, reflected in editorial policy, of casting sexuality issues in peripheral, comic and disparaged ways.

#### **4.2.5 Dominant “popular” ideologies**

It has been stressed that “public” opinion does not reflect the levelled beliefs of all members of society, or that all groups within society have equal say. Public opinion reflects particular views whose dominance has often been defined with reference to gender and sexuality. This is often manifested in patriarchal ideology, resulting in the stereotyping of men and women, and especially through the conflation of sexual identities and behaviour with prescribed gender roles. Heterosexuality is also often an implicit norm in media representations, with dominant coverage of lifestyle and image frequently endorsing the desirability of heterosexual relationships.

While patriarchal ideology and hetero-normativity are global norms in media coverage, South Africa manifests distinct popular dominant discourses. One which is currently marshalling growing influence is the discourse of tradition. Respecting culture has been central to the Constitution. This has been important in defending beliefs disparaged by racism. But these beliefs have often been played out in relation to conservative views about morality and sexuality. The conflict between the populist orientation of a newspaper like *City Press* and its conservative views on sex and sexuality can be explained by considering the sanctity of tradition in popular views.

The growing sway of “tradition” also reflects the reinforcing of religious thinking in a country where

many strictly follow Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Moreover, “tradition” is becoming increasingly important within communities where young people are often seen to have fallen victim to an unhealthy globalization and libertarianism. It is therefore noteworthy that the most popular campaigns around HIV/AIDS are those which implicitly urge traditional gender roles for women and men, and that perpetuate stereotypes about women's sexuality. Prominent figures, both men and women, in government, in religious bodies, in community and non-government organizations, have therefore turned more and more to gender roles, or to institutions such as marriage and the nuclear family, or to the (contentious) ABC response to AIDS as a panacea to a range of sex and sexuality problems. Implicit in many of these responses are efforts to re-affirm traditional restrictions, power relations and taboos.

It has been stressed that many voices in contemporary South Africa reveal a strong backlash against the libertarianism instituted through the Constitution. In the face of the “coming to voice” of formerly subordinated groups, there has been growing pressure to “reintroduce” order and social cohesion along lines which stabilize familiar power relations and silencing. The strong emotional calls to reintroduce morality, especially when pitted against such trends as drug abuse, or crime, can be made in very compelling ways. These do not always explicitly affirm repressive codes of patriarchy or heteronormativity. But the evidence, within particular media reports, of conservative voices is an important sign that South Africans cannot take their relatively newfound press freedoms for granted. Paradoxically, it may be precisely at a time when the media's freedom appears so certain that pressures to muffle sexual rights and health issues are likely to surface – both within media coverage and through the dynamics that shape such coverage.

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## **Appendix A: Profile of Publications**

<b>Newspaper: daily or weekly</b>	<b>Average Readers</b>	<b>Average Sale</b>
<i>Sunday Times</i> (weekly)	3.24 million	504 657
<i>City Press</i> (weekly)	2.06 million	177 615
<i>Mail and Guardian</i> (weekly)	233 000	39 612
<i>The Daily Voice</i> (daily)	230 000	190 000

<i>Business Day</i> (daily)	113 000	42 322
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Johnnic Publishing's *Sunday Times* is South Africa's biggest national newspaper, and includes *Sunday Times Magazine*, *Lifestyle*, *Business Times* and Metro sections. Established in 1906, the *Sunday Times* is distributed throughout South Africa and in neighbouring countries such as Lesotho, Botswana and Swaziland.

*City Press* was first published in 1982 as *Golden City Press*. It was renamed as *City Press* in 1983 by Media24, which acquired the paper in 1984. It is self-defined as “Distinctively African” and is explicitly aimed at a black readership. It is published on Sundays.

*Mail & Guardian*, formerly the *Weekly Mail*, was established at the height of anti-Apartheid resistance in 1985. At a time when many alternative newspapers were forced to fold because of lack of funding, the *Weekly Mail* established a partnership with the *Guardian* of London to ensure its survival. Currently, Zimbabwean entrepreneur Trevor Ncube's company, Newtrust Company Botswana Limited, has a majority share of 87.5% in *Mail & Guardian*, with the *Guardian* holding a 10% stake.

*Business Day* was launched in 1986 as the country's first mainstream financial newspaper. It covers corporate reporting, black economic empowerment, economic policy, corporate governance and financial markets. It is co-owned by Johnnic Publishing and London-based Pearsons plc.

*The Voice* is based on British tabloids such as the *Sun*, focusing on scandal, gossip, entertainment and sport. It is owned by Independent News and Media South Africa, the largest newspaper group in the country. *The Voice* is published daily.

## **Appendix B: Chapter 2 Bill of Rights from the South African Constitution, 1996.**

### **Section 7 Rights**

(1) This Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom.

(2) The state must respect, protect, promote, and fulfil the rights in the Bill of Rights.

(3) The rights in the Bill of Rights are subject to the limitations contained or referred to in section 36, or elsewhere in the Bill.

### **Section 8 Application**

(1) The Bill of Rights applies to all law and binds the legislature, the executive, the judiciary, and all organs of state.

(2) A provision of the Bill of Rights binds natural and juristic persons if, and to the extent that,

it is applicable, taking into account the nature of the right and of any duty imposed by the right.

(3) In applying the provisions of the Bill of Rights to natural and juristic persons in terms of subsection (2), a court -

(a) in order to give effect to a right in the Bill, must apply, or where necessary, develop, the common law to the extent that legislation does not give effect to that right; and

(b) may develop rules of the common law to limit the right, provided that the limitation is in accordance with section 36(1).

(4) Juristic persons are entitled to the rights in the Bill of Rights to the extent required by the nature of the

rights and of the juristic persons.

### **Section 9 Equality**

(1) Everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law.

(2) Equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms. To promote the achievement of equality, legislative and other measures designed to protect or advance persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination may be taken.

(3) The state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth.

(4) No person may unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds in terms of subsection (3). National legislation must be enacted to prevent or prohibit unfair discrimination.

(5) Discrimination on one or more of the grounds listed in subsection (3) is unfair unless it is established that the discrimination is fair.

### **Section 10 Human dignity**

Everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected.

### **Section 11 Life**

Everyone has the right to life.

### **Section 12 Freedom and security of the person**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom and security of the person, which includes the right -

- (a) not to be deprived of freedom arbitrarily or without just cause;
- (b) not to be detained without trial;
- (c) to be free from all forms of violence from both public and private sources;
- (d) not to be tortured in any way; and
- (e) not to be treated or punished in a cruel, inhuman or degrading way.

(2) Everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right -

- (a) to make decisions concerning reproduction;
- (b) to security in and control over their body; and
- (c) not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent.

### **Section 13 Slavery, servitude and forced labour**

No one may be subjected to slavery, servitude or forced labour.

### **Section 14 Privacy**

Everyone has the right to privacy, which includes the right not to have -

- (a) their person or home searched;
- (b) their property searched;
- (c) their possessions seized; or
- (d) the privacy of their communications infringed.

### **Section 15 Freedom of religion, belief and opinion**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion.

(2) Religious observances may be conducted at state or state-aided institutions provided that -

- (a) those observances follow rules made by the appropriate public authorities;
- (b) they are conducted on an equitable basis; and

(c) attendance at them is free and voluntary.

(3) (a) This section does not prevent legislation recognising -

(i) marriages concluded under any tradition or a system of religious, personal or family law; or

(ii) systems of personal and family law under any tradition or adhered to by persons professing a particular religion.

(b) Recognition in terms of paragraph (a) must be consistent with this section and the other provisions of the Constitution.

### **Section 16 Freedom of expression**

(1) Everyone has the right to freedom of expression, which includes -

(a) freedom of the press and other media;

(b) freedom to receive and impart information and ideas;

(c) freedom of artistic creativity; and

(d) academic freedom and freedom of scientific research.

(2) The right in subsection (1) does not extend to -

(a) propaganda for war;

(b) incitement of imminent violence; or

(c) advocacy of hatred that is based on race, ethnicity, gender or religion, and that constitutes incitement to cause harm.

### **Section 17 Assembly, demonstration, picket and petition**

Everyone has the right, peacefully and unarmed, to assemble, to demonstrate, to picket, and to present petitions.

### **Section 18 Freedom of association**

Everyone has the right to freedom of association

### **Appendix C: Biography of Researcher**

Desiree Lewis currently teaches Women's and Gender Studies at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. She has worked as a lecturer and researcher on cultural studies and feminist theory and politics at the Universities of the Witwatersrand, Natal and Cape Town (African Gender Institute). She has also worked as an independent researcher and consultant. Her work foci have included: gender-based violence in South Africa, gender research within Africa; and gender and policy-making for local government in South Africa.

**Online publications on gender include:**

*Gender and Women's Studies in South Africa: A Review*

<http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/index.html>

*African Women's Studies: A Bibliography 1980-2001:* <http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/index.html>

*African Feminist Studies: 1980-2002: A Review Monograph*

(<http://www.gwsafrica.org/knowledge/index.html>)

*Gender and Women's Studies in South Africa: A Review*

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Recent publications dealing with gender and culture are:

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