CONCLUSION

The objective of this final chapter is to discuss the findings in relation to my three research questions and objectives as stated in Introduction. I also mention significant examples (included in Appendix D) that demonstrate the news media’s valuable reporting on this issue of women’s health. Finally I suggest a working model of media for development for women’s health in the realm of PMTCT.

The chapter outline is as follows:

- The general representation and concerns covered in news articles concerning PMTCT;
- What this coverage implies in regards to news media’s framework for reporting on women’s health issues;
- The reconstruction of news media to become a media for the development of women’s health in the realm of PMTCT; and
- From the ‘margins’ – a working model of media for development.

7.1 The silence of HIV-positive mothers in news coverage about PMTCT

My first research question asks what and who media covered in relation to the topic of PMTCT. The representation and the prominent concerns captured in news articles may imply the type of engagement news media has with these issues. In this section, I critique
the lack of representation of women directly affected by these issues in the news coverage.

The major finding in the news articles about who is represented and which voices are sourced concurs with Spurr’s (2005) finding that those directly affected by the issue of PMTCT are the marginal voices. The silencing of these HIV-positive pregnant women’s voices is evident. While I am not suggesting that this is intentional on behalf of the news media, the dominant reliance on “source professionalisation” (Gurevitch and Blumler, 2000, p. 31) excludes the voices that deal with issues of PMTCT daily.

In some of the articles journalists sourced women and mothers infected with HIV and their voices were used to describe the obstacles they face in having children and being HIV-positive, however they were not enough to counteract the amount of stories written about the Health Minister questionable remarks.

The sub-theme about mother’s being key to PMTCT intricately involves issues of infant feeding; still, there is only one article that I found written by Jillian Green, ‘AIDS reporter’ for the Star, that focuses specifically on breastfeeding and the logistics of infant feeding for HIV-positive mothers. Also the issue of women’s sexual reproductive rights is a complex and important issue in discussions around PMTCT and HIV/AIDS; however Nicola Spurr’s article (Appendix D2), in the Mail and Guardian, is the only article in my selection that speaks directly to issues concerning women’s reproductive rights. This is
an instance where news media brings up pertinent debates to women’s health and women’s rights in the realm of HIV/AIDS.

Nevertheless, there were few ‘human stories’ in regards to sourcing a HIV-positive mother asking her of why she became pregnant, and how she may cope with issues around infant feeding, or manage to take care of her child if she herself falls deathly ill. In addition the sourcing tends to be health professionals or civil society, who speak on behalf of these women. Though these voices are integral to this issue, these perspectives cannot be a substitute for women whose human development is directly affected by these matters. This can even be viewed as “pseudo participation” which is a critique of the empowerment framework (Melkote, 2003; White, 1994); where these voices of authority are speaking on behalf of HIV-positive pregnant women.

Gurevitch and Blumler state that politicians and “would-be opinion moulders are competing fiercely for access to exposure in the media…” (2000, p. 31). In other words these sources make themselves readily available with prepared sound bites, or “one-liners” of what they feel the newspapers need to include (ibid). This results in discursive coverage throughout many of the articles; simply discussing whether Nevirapine is good or bad or whether the Minister of Health is right or wrong.

Conversely, HIV-positive women and their families may not readily avail themselves to reporters because of real threats of stigma and discrimination. One interview respondent suggests that the news media consider acute sensitivity to these issues and secure
anonymity for these people; this is demonstrated in some of the news articles. Theorists stress that the authentic participation of the marginalised is imperative (Steeves, 2003). This participation contributes to the indispensable information role that Curran (1996) states involves the media providing diverse viewpoints to create an empathetic and supportive society. Interview respondents concur and state that issues like infant feeding is one area where media can raise awareness and facilitate in diminishing stigma and ostracisation.

Steeves (2003) critiques the inaccessibility of development communications as continuing the marginalisation of women and women’s issues. Consequently, media seems to perpetuate the social subordination of women, by not including the various voices and experiences of women of women. Nevertheless, the voices of women are not the only pertinent factor in their human development, it is critical to include voices from families and communities of how HIV/AIDS has impacted their lives and how it can be mitigated.

Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) state that identifying and reporting on the contextual social factors is important for media to be a participatory and democratic platform. The contexts of denial about the prevalence of HIV-infection in the society, the presence of stigma in families and throughout communities are not consistently discussed in any depth throughout the articles. Media for development should expose the layers and the underlying forces of these issues of women’s health in the realm of PMTCT to facilitate social change.
7.2 The framework of the news media’s engagement with women’s health in the realm of PMTCT

The fundamental role of the news media as a market-driven enterprise is to prioritise the commercial imperative to sell newspapers (Cottle, 2003). This is not to suggest that journalists only have interest in writing articles that make good commercial sense, however it implies that the environment of the news media may encourage journalists to search for stories that strongly appeal to their consumers. From this perspective news media’s framework is one of business; however, the democratic portfolio of media (Gurevitch & Blumler, 2002) suggest that media is accountable to more then their consumers—citizens. In this section, I discuss the news media’s social and democratic responsibility of engaging with the concerns of women’s health and HIV/AIDS and the news media’s priority to be a viable business.

Interview respondents continually mention the external force of advertisements as significant in the newspaper industry. Cottle (2003, p. 54) states that media-owners are looking for the largest possible market and readers with disposable income to attract advertisers. Critiques of the liberal theory for the press state that the press is not free to serve the public because of the influential role advertisers have on the content of newspapers and accessibility of the press to the public (McChesney, 2003; Golding & Murdock, 2000). One respondent mentions that in many papers in South Africa, newspapers consist of 60% adverts, and journalists have to vie to get their stories in the remaining 40%. Thus news media encourages stories that will achieve the greatest
number of consumers so as to attract more advertisers, which consequently illustrates the need for stories with high news values. This theory is confirmed by the prevalence of stories in the selection that are full of HIV/AIDS treatment controversy.

According to Connelly and Macleod (2003) media coverage concerning HIV/AIDS issues tend to include elements of political contestation. In addition, Galtung and Ruge (1981) state that reference to elite persons increase the newsworthiness of a story. Consequently, the debates surrounding the use of Nevirapine for PMTCT present a certain amount of news values because of the conflict and the well-known people, including the Minister of Health. The findings validate these theories because the majority of the stories that were selected involve a controversial remark from the Minister of Health.

The type of sourcing and the content of news media’s coverage involving PMTCT suggest that news media is generally using a top-down linear approach to these issues. Now this can also be seen as the news media being a “watchdog” for the public by investigating the comments of public officials. As Jillian Green states in her interview, “I need to challenge the indecision [of the government] … to get as much information as I can … ask her [the Minister of Health] to respond…” However, the general findings illustrate what Finlay (2004, p. 20) describes as “ad hominem;” instead of an investigation of the statements on the use of Nevirapine, news media criticises the personal integrity of the Minister of Health. Consequently, the majority of the news coverage falls short of what Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) state as the news media’s
responsibility to cover the stories in-depth by analysing the broader socio-political and economic arenas of social issues—to effectively articulate the scale of the problem outside of the political controversy.

In this research report, news values are discussed as serving the commercial imperative of the news media. Still, there are articles (though few) in the selection which demonstrate that issues with high newsworthiness and those that may serve the public can be integrated into important reporting. The reality of the pandemic of HIV/AIDS in South Africa, with close to 30% of all women attending ante-natal clinics being HIV-positive (UNAIDS, 2005), there is not a community that is unaffected by HIV/AIDS in some way. According to Galtung and Ruge (1981) concept of new values, stories that indicate this pressing development concern are highly newsworthy because of the strong relevance HIV/AIDS issues have in South Africa. Some interviewee respondents actually state that if newspapers considered this significance they would be more inclined to write more engaging stories about HIV/AIDS.

Some theorists state that the market place is a difficult terrain for the news media to promote democracy and development (McChesney, 2003; Cottle, 2003). Nevertheless, this research, based on theory and research findings argues that market theory should not absolve the news media’s social responsibility to cover issues pertinent to this type of transformation and human development. While news media in South Africa is a market-driven enterprise, the development issue of PMTCT asks news media to make imperative
the democratic and development mandate to provide information and critical debate for an enlightened citizenry.

7.3 The extent to which media can facilitate the development of women’s health in the realm of PMTCT

The findings presented in the previous chapter imply that news media should reconsider their engagement with these issues of PMTCT in various ways in order to contribute to the betterment of women’s health. Interview respondents suggest that from structural and institutional levels to the creative assertiveness of the journalist, news media have to be more proactive in covering such pertinent concerns of development.

Interview respondents, particularly the media analysts, state that each newspaper must make clear what their standpoint is in terms of covering such issues. For instance in the newsroom, the editorial policy, gender policy or HIV/AIDS policy—clearing stating how that particular newspaper will cover these issues. Jillian Green, ‘AIDS reporter’, for *The Star* states that this newspaper has made a comprehensible decision on how it sees the HIV/AIDS pandemic in South Africa. Green was previously a ‘health reporter’ but the wide-ranging impact of HIV/AIDS in the country, she says, requires more attention. In addition, Green states that people want more stories about HIV/AIDS, based on the letters from the readers. This challenges the idea of readership fatigue stated in Stein’s (2002) report.
Nevertheless, Kubi Rama asserts that journalists generally do not have a handle on how to cover stories in a comprehensive manner. In Stein’s (2002, p. 24) study journalists state that they struggle with writing about AIDS from other angles “how do you write about AIDS orphans in a different way.” Rama says that organisations like GenderLinks (which she is Deputy Director) can assist newsrooms with a checklist of how to write about stories pertaining to HIV/AIDS and women’s health. Philippa Garson does however note that journalists may want to write investigative stories but there is often not the space or the time allocated for these marginalised development issues. She notes that the fellowship, “HIV/AIDS and the Media Project,” that she was a part of allowed her to write good comprehensive articles about HIV-positive women attending the ante-natal clinics and the various concerns they have. Her article discussing microbicides (Appendix D5) is an illustration of news media engaging with current science and issues that could contribute to the human development of women, not only in South Africa, but internationally.

Coyne and Leeson (2004) state that media should encourage new demands for consumers, instead of the hyper-commercialism, coverage on issues that contribute to the development of the society. Jillian Green states in her interview response that the Star recognised that their consumers are becoming increasingly black and female. With the feminisation of the disease in South Africa, the Star notices that issues surrounding HIV/AIDS, including PMTCT, may have significant relevance to this readership. The increase of consumer power of black females may heighten the newsworthiness of these
issues. Also, the bearing of the pandemic on every community in South Africa, and not just that of black females, signals a need to re-evaluate the relevance of critical news coverage of these issues on newspaper consumers.

A primary objective of my research was to discuss the capacity of news media in facilitating the human development of HIV-positive pregnant women in South Africa. The articles analysed depict a limited capacity on behalf of the news media to be a platform for social change in this fashion. However, there are a few stories (as aforementioned) that demonstrate the possibility of news media to upgrade their coverage on this development issue from political controversy to focusing on the human imperative.

Many interview respondents actually state that journalists should ask themselves “who is most affected by this story” in addition to making such issues relevant to the general public of South Africa. Freire’s (1970 in Waisbord, 2003) concept of conscientisation is useful for this endeavour for it highlights how a horizontal (as opposed to vertical or top down) discussion between news media and the public can stimulate critical awareness and consciousness about the society and the pertinent issues that affect the society. A media for development sees the necessity of news media being a viable business, as well as viewing the channels of communication as a reliable platform for social change and development.
7.4 From the margins - A working model of media for development

As I discussed throughout my research report, there is an urgent call to rethink a media for development, specifically for the human development of HIV-positive women in South Africa. As stated earlier, this research does not wish to discount the place of commercial print media but instead to ask if this market-driven enterprise can engage with critical and relevant issues that directly affect a large part of the population of South Africa: women. Roger Silverstone proposes a media that comes from “the margins…from the underbelly of social life” (in Atton, 2003, p. 41). While he is talking of an alternative media, my research questions whether commercial print media make news media relevant for the marginalised, and specifically for this report: HIV-positive pregnant women and their families.

News media, in this research, is understood as a significant means that can foster social change and development through the inclusion of various viewpoints and perspectives; however, as Lippman (2000, p. 42) notes: “the press is no substitute for institutions.” The literature and responses from interviews makes note that the politicisation around these issues of PMTCT create a very difficult terrain in which the news media can write comprehensively and meaningfully without being sidetracked by the political drama.

One of the main purposes of my research was to propose how and why the news media should reveal other layers to these social challenges, particularly those parameters that are marginalised. There is an opportunity here for the news media: for them to be loyal to their consumers through presenting stories with high newsworthiness as well as being
accountable to citizens by covering these issues accurately and meaningfully. A media for development that considers the democratic and development mandate to create understanding and debate around issues of PMTCT, women’s health, and the development of South Africa.

Media for development, for my research, is the utilisation of the media to enhance the voices of women in order to contribute to their health and human development, specifically concerning PMTCT, as a marginalised developmental concern. Based on all the theoretical concepts and the findings in this research report, the newspaper coverage of matters of PMTCT and therapy and women’s health should consider strengthening the engagement of these women in relation to socio-economic and political issues that directly affect them. A media for development, for this agenda, should include:

1. Primarily sourcing HIV-positive pregnant women to tell of their experiences and the various parameters that are involved with the issue of PMTCT;
2. Including the perspectives of their families and communities to discuss the wide effects of HIV/AIDS;
3. Asking for the viewpoints of civil society to contribute to the “watchdog” role of the media and to bring awareness to issues that pervade the country and concerns surrounding current policy;
4. Using the health community as a resource for factual and current science surrounding regimens for treatment and prevention; and
(5) Drawing attention to the structures and institutions that perpetuate such social challenges.

All of which should be in an effort to create support and empathy throughout the society and to de-stigmatise the pandemic and eradicate discrimination.

According to the UN Development Report (2002, p. 23) “[w]orse outcomes for women in many aspects of human development result from the fact that their voices have less impact than men’s in the decisions that shape their lives.” In particular, within the context of HIV/AIDS the “voiceless” position of women is an actuality that contributes to the risk and vulnerability of women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa, with approximately 75% of all HIV-positive women worldwide living in this region (UNAIDS 2004). The premise of this research views media as an indispensable platform in promoting such neglected matters as women’s empowerment and health in developing countries.

As stated earlier, the use of media in development is an interdisciplinary subject that is sparking new research interest in the field of socio-economic development (World Bank, 2002). My research wishes to contribute to this by stating the significant potential and possibilities of news media in facilitating developmental gaps of often marginalised concerns, women’s health in the realm of PMTCT in South Africa.