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Representation of women on the main South African public television news bulletins 1999-2005: a critical analysis of representation of women on Women's Day

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Aim

The aim of the study is to critically analyse the representation of women on the main South African public televisions news bulletins between 1999 and 2005. In doing so, the study attempts to fill a gap in research on patterns of representation of women in television news. The extremely small number of studies that have been conducted on representation of women on television so far; have tended to be too broad in their approaches; surveying a multiplicity of instances of television representations all at once; including public and commercial television, soap operas, situational comedies and advertisements. The result of such approaches have been findings that raise more questions than answers as to why women continue to be represented in particular ways and roles as alleged in discourses on gender.

1.2 Rationale

The focus of the study is unique in that it critically investigates patterns of representation of women on Women's Day in South Africa as a case study of representation of women in television news. Little research has been conducted on why patterns of representation of women on public television news remains largely similar even on Women's Day. Often the question that is overlooked is how the representation of women on public television news on Women's Day is different from the representation of women on commercial televion news on Women's Day; or on any other day for that matter.

What this oversight suggests is that there is a need for a systematic study of public televion news; and on the basis of the findings of such a study, recommend careful strategies for improving images of women in news. The implementation of such strategies will be an important addition to the existing body of knowledge on patterns of representation of women on television news. Also, previous studies have tended to focus on what is perceived to be the dominance and prevalence of the portrayal of women in stereotypical sex-roles as discussed in the literature review. Many media theorists argue that the news media portrays women in sterotypical roles as housewives, mothers, passive subjects and objectifies them as victims and objects of sex (Tuchman 1978a; Cowie 1978; Seiter 1986; Fiske 1987; van Zoonen 1988; Rakow and Kranich 1991; Byerly and Ross 2006).

The study therefore adresses the question of whether the main South African public television news portray women in similar ways, with negative and stereotypical frames of meaning dominating. Issues around news as an ideology and gendered narrative; theories of news production and representation will inform answers to this question.

1.3 Research questions

In using the foregoing theoretical approaches to analyse the coverage of women on public televion news, the following research questions will contribute towards formulating the overall conclusion of this study:

1. In what ways does the main South African public television news represent women?
2. Do these representations differ from routine patterns because it is Women's Day in South Africa?
3. How could these frames of meaning be explained?

1.4 Limitations of the study

The research is limited to a study of media representation of women on Women's Day and Women's Month on public television and excludes investigations into similar representations on e-tv, South Africa's privately owned television station nor on radio. An investigation into the representation of women on Women's Day and Women's Month in newspapers or new media is also excluded. Within public television, focus is on the main English language news bulletins of the South African Broadcasting Corporation and excludes advertisements, news bulletins broadcast in African languages and the rest of the public broadcaster's programmes like current affairs, talk shows, entertainment and sports.

The study's focus on the representation of women at the ruling African National Congress (ANC) Women's League dominated Women's Day rallies places a marked restriction on the diversity of situations that could be ventilated. Such a restriction essentially places women who ordinarily do not participate in Women's Day rallies outside of the realm of the investigation. Excluded in this way would be women from non-ANC affiliated women's organisations like those from the Inkatha Freedom Party, the Democratic Alliance, the United Democratic Movement and the rest of the country's apolitical women.

There was little or no news coverage of women's lives at the beginning of Women's Month, immediately after Women's Day and the rest of Women's Month available for analysis. While useful as a tool of analysis, the research material does not adequately shine the spotlight on gender relations in the home, in the ubiquitous religious organisations and the socialisation of girls and boys in the home, at school and in the church. General television programmes, talk-shows, current affairs, entertainment and advertisements are excluded from the study by design. The objective of these exclusions is to give the study a strong focus on the representation of real women's lives.

As a critique of media representation of women the binary discourse or dichotomous 'negative'/'positive' framework employed by the study is also a limited tool of analysis because it assumes that there is a 'norm' against which the representation of women in the media can be judged. As Gallagher (1995:23) argues, in reality things are more complicated. The same kind of images can embody different meanings, depending on the context. A more promising route seems to be offered by the search for greater 'diversity' in gender portrayal (Gallagher 1995:23).

1.5 Chapter outline

The study is divided into six chapters: Chapter One introdues the study. Chapter Two reviews the three-tier theoretical framework of the study comprised of discourse analysis, semiotic analysis and theories of news production. Chapter Three oulines the analystical methods used in the study. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study. Chapter Five analyses the findings of the study focussing on the gender of sources, language, and the gender and sex-role in which women are represented on public television news. Chapter Six concludes the study.

1.6 Context of the study

The 9th of August, South Africa's National Women's Day is named after the same day in 1956 when 20 000 South African women of all races marched onto the Union Building in Pretoria. The Union Buildings are the seat of the South African government. The women were protesting against a decision by then apartheid Prime Minister JG Strydom to extend restrictive pass laws to African women. The carrying of 'passes' or personal identification documents was already compulsory for African men. These documents allowed Africans to enter 'white areas' as labourers for specified periods. Failure to comply entailed harsh and indefinite imprisonment. Today the 9th of August or Women's Day as it is officially known in South Africa is mainly about three things at one and the same time. Firstly, Women's Day is about celebrating South African women's

contribution to the country's national liberation struggle during the apartheid years. Secondly, Women's Day is about recognising the agency of women in the fight for gender equality at all levels of South African society. Thirdly, and perhaps more importantly, Women's Day is about evaluating the situation of women in post-apartheid South Africa.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

Introduction

This study will use discourse and semiotic analyses within a cultural studies paradigm; and theories of news production as the theoretical approach in its analysis of patterns of representation of women in television news. These methodologies are intrinsic aspects in the analysis of media texts and will help the study in systematically analysing the representation of women in television news. Media theorists posit that methodologies within the cultural studies paradigm primarily explore issues of the production of culture with a special focus on social power and its impact on society (Dahlgren 1997; Golding and Murdock 2000; Hesmondhalgh 2007).

2.1 Cultural studies

A considerable amount of literature has been published on cultural studies. This literature indicates that cultural studies mainly focus on the construction of meaning and more broadly, on the power relations that inform the process of producing meaning (Garnham 1997; Lemon 2001; Milner 2002). Media representation, the central area of concern of this study is a dominant theme in cultural studies (Dahlgren 1997; O'Leary 2007). In using cultural studies to explore the social construction of meaning, the study will explain how meaning is embedded in media texts and how such meaning is in fact a reflection of the distribution of power between men and women in society. Mosco (1996) argues that cultural studies are a broad based intellectual movement that "concentrates on the constitution of meaning in texts" (1996:247). The foregoing view on cultural studies is corroborated by Dahlgren (1997) who posits that "meaning is embodied in social institutions and practices through the process of representation" (1997:54).

2.1.1 Representation

Newbold et al. (2002) explain that 'representation' refers to the process by which images signs and symbols are made to convey certain meanings. The study will conceive of "representation as images, signs and symbols that claim to stand for, re-present or mediate some aspects of reality such as objects, people, groups, places, events, social norms, cultural identities and so on" (Newbold et al. 2002: 260). As du Plooy (2001) and Williams (2003) argue, these images, signs and events become "various representations that are created and maintained by the media, in the form of media texts or content" (du Plooy 2001:8; Williams 2003:116). However Manning (2001) cautions that when the media constructs these representations, they are "not accurate" mirrors or reflections of a reality out there, but rather representations "develop from processes of fabrications" (2001:50). This viewpoint is corroborated by other media theorists who argue that representations are "never completely accurate" (Hilton and von Hippel 1996:71; Ferguson 1998:159). Other theorists posit that media representations influence views that audiences hold about the world (Ruotolo 1988; Schlesinger 1991; Hilton and von Hippel 1996). The types of representations focused on in the study include the types of news narratives embodied in the issues selected for broadcasting, language and visual images of women in television news. Ferguson (1998) points out that the circulation of inaccurate representations by the news media results from "a production process that oversupplies negative images of members of certain groups" (1998: 262).

An important feature of inaccurate representations is that they tend to be seen by audiences; and applied by the news media as the natural order of things, through the use of frames of meanings (Curran 1996; Hilton and von Hippel 1996; Grossberg, Wartella and Whitney 1996). Croteau and Hoynes (1997) argue that it is important to investigate how representations distort reality given the fact that "white middle and upper middle-class men have historically controlled the media industry; and media content has largely reflected their perspectives on the world" (1997:133). In drawing a line between representations and reality, Croteau and Hoynes (1997) emphasise further that representations should always be treated as the result of a news production process. This is an emphasis that the study will adopt as one of its main theoretical approaches.

2.1.2 Representation as an ideology

Newbold et al. (2002) argue that the use of frames by the news media to make inaccurate representations look natural can be understood as their ideological role or function. Newbold et al. (2002) define the ideological role of representations as the various ways through which media constructions are made to look natural.

Chandler (1997) points to a number of questions that should be asked about naturalised representations:

> What is being represented; who is represented; using what codes; within which genre? How is the representation made to seem 'true', 'commonsense' or 'natural' What is fore-grounded and what is back-grounded? Are there any notable absences? Whose representation is it? Whose interest does it reflect? How do you know? At whom is the representation targeted? How do you know? What does the representation mean to you? What does the representation mean to others? How do you account for the differences? How do people make sense of it? According to what codes? With what alternative representations could it be compared? How does it differ? (Chandler 1997: 19)

Although representations may be constructed in any news medium, Corner (1999) argues that it is in television news in which representations appear to resemble reality more closely than in any other news medium; when in fact the reality is that "television audiences consume images that stand in place of real things and people" (Corner 1999:255). Fiske (1991) explains this distortion as follows:

> The core argument in theories of representation is that despite appearances, television does not represent or re-present a piece of reality but rather produces or constructs it. Reality does not exist in the objectivity of empiricism but is a product of discourse. The television camera and microphone do not record reality, but encode it: the encoding produces a sense of reality that is ideological. What is re-presented, then, is not reality but ideology, and the affectivity of this ideology is enhanced by the iconicity of television by which the medium purports to situate its truth claim in the objectivity of the real, and thus disguise the fact that any truth it produces is that of ideology, not reality (1991: 55).

McQueen (1998), Dyer (1985) and Grossberg (1998) postulate that a further aspect of representations is that they are selective, framed or limited, and mediated. Newbold et al. (2002) explain that representations are selective, framed and mediated because out of a large amount of information; very little of it is actually presented in the media:

> In the much studied case of television news, for example, only very few stories are selected to become part of a news programme and even these items are edited down from many hours of footage to several minutes. Thus a large amount of alternative information is being excluded. Indeed, the question of what of all possible, conflicting, perspectives is being represented and/or what has been left out needs always to be asked. In most audience consumption, it is safe to assume that these questions are generally forgotten. Related to this is the fact that representations are limited or framed, as for instance, the very fact that the television camera is placed in front of "reality" means that only a fraction of it being focused on (2002: 261).

Dyer (1993) arrives at similar conclusions and delineates the main attributes of representations as follows:

> Representations are selective: individuals in the media are often used to replace a group of people. One member of this group then represents the whole social group. Representations are culture-specific: representations are presentations. The use of codes and conventions available in a culture shapes and restricts what can be said about any aspect of reality in a given place, in a given society and at a given time. Representations are subject to interpretation: although visual codes are restricted by cultural convention, they do not have single determinate meaning. To a certain degree the meaning of representations is a matter of interpretation (1993:2).

The foregoing citations are significant for this study as they clearly articulate the fact that the media's relationship to social reality is constructionist rather mimetic or reflective. simply reflecting concepts or realities that already exist in the world independently of it As constructionists theorists like O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) have shown, "the media does not just describe a pre-existing reality but rather constructs it through naming or portraying it in certain patterns of meaning" (O'Shaughnessy and Stadler 2005:40). This study accepts the constructionist position as opposed to the reflective position and postulates that the media encourages audiences to think about reality in particular ways through systems of representations. As Dyer (1993) has also pointed out, "how we are seen determines in part how we are treated, how we treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from media representation" (1993:1).

2.1.3 Language

Rigney (2007) argues that representations construct and direct "our view of the world with the help of language" (Rigney 2007:415). Therefore the construction of media texts and content through the use of language will be considered by this study as a critical mode of representation. Hall (1994) argues that the production of meaning of concepts in our minds occurs through language; and posits further that "it is the link between concepts and languages that enables us to refer either to the real world of objects, people or events; or indeed to the imaginary worlds of fictional objects, people or events" (1997: 17).

Steinberg (1994) defines language as a unified system of signs that permit the sharing of meaning. Steinberg (1994) posits further that the words that create language are signs; and that these words are the "written representations of sounds that people have agreed will stand for something" (1994:48) consequently "creating a significant communicator of meaning and assumptions" (Jalbert 1983:323). Sonderling (1996) also argues that the communication of meaning in the news media is never a neutral process. Accordingly, "meaning is always produced by someone for someone and says something about someone, indicating that meaning produced through language both includes and excludes information" (1983:61). This viewpoint on the nature of communication of meaning is

taken further by Choi (2004) who argues that "metaphors, catch phrases, depictions, and naming… can all be used to evoke images and increase the salience or intensity of a particular characteristic" (2004:31).

A general example of language bias can be found in political naming where terms such as 'terrorist', 'guerrilla' and 'freedom fighter' have been used by different political formations to refer to the same people. In the data used in this research, language bias is present in the way that women are consistently referred to in terms of their relationship to men and children as the wife and/or daughter of a certain man or mother of so many children; rather than in terms of their social standing. Such language biases tend to discriminate against women as the focus of the discourse is on women's gendered social roles rather than on their abilities as individuals.

By adopting cultural studies and semiotic approaches, the study will also be emphasising the relevance of the language used by news sources. As Boyd-Barret et al. (2007) say news sources work within certain structures, indicating that their contribution to media content is also a construction; a representation of their respective owner (Boyd-Barrett et al. 2007:193). Hall et al. (1978) draws attention to the power of language in forming recurrent themes and representations around a given subject as "falling within the use of widespread cultural and social ideas" (Hall et al. 1978:58). Moritz (2008) and Louw (2001) believe that using these cultural and social ideas consistently through language and meaning, a frame of reference is created and reinforces widely held views on a subject. Hall et al. (1978) argue further that "in presenting information obtained from sources, the media plays a secondary role in *reproducing* the definitions of those who have privileged access to information" (Hall et al.1978:59). For these reasons, the study will also conceive of the language of reporting as a distributor of representation of women in television news.

2.1.4 Stereotypes

As Manning (2001) has postulated above, when the news media constructs representations of media texts, these representations are "not accurate mirrors or reflections of a reality out there but representations that develop from processes of fabrications" (Manning 2001:50). Also as shown above, this viewpoint is corroborated by other media theorists who argue that representations are "never completely accurate" (Hilton and von Hippel 1996:71; Ferguson 1998:262). Seiter (1986) posits that a ubiquitous form of inaccurate representation in media content is the 'stereotype' Seiter posits further that the ubiquitous presence of stereotypes in the news media has "led to the use of the concept as a dirty word" (Seiter 1986:14). O'Sullivan et al. (1998) define a stereotype as a label which involves a process of categorisation and evaluation:

> In its simplest terms, a stereotype is an easily grasped characteristic - usually negative - presumed to belong to whole group like women or black Africans; in ideological terms, stereotyping is a means by which support is provided for one group's differential - often discriminatory - treatment of another group (1998: 87).

This definition is confirmed by Taylor and Willis (1999) who explain that a stereotype refers to the selection and construction of undeveloped and generalised signs which categorize social groups or individual members of a group. Taylor and Willis (1999) argue that the "crude selected signs used to construct stereotypes represent values, attitudes, behaviour and background of the group concerned (1999:39). A critical analysis of the portrayal of women in stereotypical sex roles in television news as mothers, housewives and passive crowds at Women's Day rallies and their objectification as victims and people in need of government assistance is central to this study.

Stereotypes of women in television news have been widely condemned as problematic by prominent media theorists as they are believed to objectify them by focusing on their physical appearances; and portraying them in limited sex-roles (Tuchman 1978a:150; Gerbner 1972:175; Acosta-Alzuru 1998:139). Tuchman (1978a) further argues that the news media symbolically annihilates women by largely ignoring them or portraying them in stereotypical roles as victims, mothers, or housewives:

> Most media portray women – if at all – in the traditional roles of homemaker, mother – or if they are in paid workforce – as clerical workers and in other pink-collar jobs. Correspondingly – they are few if any – depictions of strong female characters in position of authority, even inside the home. Similarly women's magazine focus on the domestic pursuits of marriage, child bearing and the like – while not encouraging education, training and other choices that tend to bring individuals into positions of power, authority and independence. Instead women are shown to be defined in terms of their relationships with men – suggesting that women are, in the end, dependent and incapable of living their own lives without male guidance (1978a:150).

Tuchman (1978a) adds that there are two related ideas that are central to an analysis of stereotypical representations of women in the news media:

> These are the 'reflection of reality' hypothesis and the 'symbolic annihilation' hypothesis. According to the reflection of reality hypothesis, the mass media reflects dominant societal values and the corporate character of the commercial variety causes programme planners to design programmes for appeal to the largest audiences. To attract these audiences - whose time and attention are sold to commercial sponsors – the television industry offers programmes consonant with dominant values. The pursuit of this aim is solidified by the fact that so many members of the television industry take these values for granted. Dominant ideas and ideals serve as a resource for development, programme planners are as unaware of them as much as we all take for granted the air that we breathe. Before the advent of the women's movement, those stereotypes seemed 'natural', a given. Few questioned how they had developed or generated, how they

> reinforced or how they were maintained. Certainly the media's role in this was not questioned. These ideas and ideals are incorporated into the news media as symbolic representations and not as literal portrayals (1978a:150).

Tuchman (1978a) argues further that to the degree that the news media influence behaviour and attitudes, consistent repetitions of stereotypical representations of women could encourage the maintenance of their subordinate position in society:

> Societal needs for the continuity and the transmission of dominant values maybe particularly acute in times of rapid social change, such as our own. Nowhere are these needs as readily identifiable as in the area of "sex–roles stereotypes". "Sex–role stereotypes" are set portrayals of sex appropriate appearance, interest, skills, behaviours and self-perceptions. Sex-stereotypes are more stringent than guidelines in suggesting to persons not conforming, specified ways of appearance, feeling or behaviour. It is in the area of sex-role stereotypes where social expectations have been changing most rapidly over the past few decades. In 1920, 24% of the nation's adult women worked for pay outside the home and most of them were not married. 50 years later in 1976, more than 50% of all American women between the ages of 18 and 64 were in the labour force and most were married with children of preschool age. One third of all American women with children between the ages of three and five were employed in 1976. Such a transformation not only affects women, it affects their families as well, as members are forced to make adjustments in their shared lives; and working men increasingly encounter productive women who insist on an abandonment of old prejudices and discriminatory behaviour. In the face of such changes, the portrayal of sex roles in the mass media is a topic of great social, political and economic importance (1978a:153).

Tuchman (1978a) cites the typical American television family of the 1950s to support her arguments:

> The family was made up of mother, father and two children living in an upper-middle class single residence suburban home. Such families and homes were not the most commonly found units in America in the 1950s, but there were the American ideal. Following Gerbner (1972:175), we say that such representations of the fictional world as the ideal American family of the 1950s symbolized or signified social existence- that is- representations in the mass media announce to audience members that this kind of family or social characteristic is valued and approved (1978a:153).

Acosta-Alzuru (1998) argues that images of women in the news media – especially as mothers, housewives and caregivers:

> Are also shaped by a traditional vision of women's role in society and by a stereotypical concept of women as emotional, irrational and unstable; the viewer sees suffering mothers and beautiful young girls; great emphasis is placed on the women's physical appearance, their clothes and fancy hairstyles. Stories about

> women in the news media are typically written from a first world perspective and women's own voices; thirdly, these stories in general trivialize and simplify women's activities and experiences rather than treating them as legitimate and significant (1998:139).

Kramarae and Spender (2000) argue that stereotypical representation of women in the news media could also be explained by looking at the ideologies that underpin approaches to women and news in Latin American countries:

> In general, news coverage in Latin American countries is pervaded by two ideologies: *'machismo'*, the idea that men are superior to women; have more extensive rights and belong to the public sphere while women should stay in men's shadows and in the private realm and: *'marianismo'*, the idea that women are morally superior to men; have spiritual strengths and a capacity for self-sacrifice that make them good mothers and wives. The combination of these two ideologies result in coverage that seldom focuses on the few women who hold public office or those in grassroots organizations who address the human rights of women, environmental degradation and the plight of poor urban families (2000:1190).

Tuchman (1978a) also remarks that stereotypical or symbolic representations of women in the news media may not be up to date:

> Time lag might be operating, for non material conditions which shape symbols, change more slowly than do material conditions. This notion of a time lag or a 'cultural lag' as sociologists term it – maybe incorporated into the 'reflection hypothesis': as values change, we would expect the images of society presented by the news media also. Further, we might expect one medium to change faster than another. Because of variations in economic organizations, each medium has a slightly different relation to changing material conditions. The reflection hypothesis also includes the notion that media planners try to build audiences and the audience desired by media planners might vary from medium to medium. For instance, television programmers may seek an audience of men and women, without distinguishing between women in the labour force and housewives. But executives at women's magazines may want to attract women who in the labour force – magazine advertisements essentially support magazines as a medium-since it costs much more to produce each copy than to sell it. Accordingly, we might find that that the symbolic annihilation of women by television is much more devastating than that by women's magazines (1978a:154).

However Seiter (1986) has called for a re-evaluation of the way stereotypes have been used to explain representations of women in the news media. Seiter (1986) argues that these explanations are inadequate because of their failure to account for the evaluative, historical as well as the descriptive aspects of stereotypes that has led to the labelling of the term as a 'dirty word'. Seiter (1986) posits that scholars in social psychology, mass communications and popular culture use the term 'stereotype' differently and often

approach different areas in their research: audiences for social psychologists; television in general for mass communications researchers; and specific texts and genres for popular culture critics. Seiter (1986) argues that: "in each case, the definition of stereotype and the kinds of assumptions employed raise political and pedagogical questions" (Seiter 1986:15). In her critique of the study of stereotypes, Seiter (1986) compares the way social psychologists and mass communications researchers have approached the concept.

For example, Seiter (1986) cites social psychologists Babad et al (1983) as arguing that most - if not all social psychologists - believe that stereotypes are universal and are used by every human being in processing information about the social environment:

> In our opinion, stereotypes are not only inevitable but are also usually quite functional for effective social interaction…Stereotypes are generalizations about social groups-characteristics that are attributed to all members of a given group, without regard to variations that must exist among members of that group. Stereotypes are not necessarily based on people's first hand experiences with members of stereotyped groups. They may be learned from others of from the mass media…The lack of regard for difference within the stereotyped group makes stereotypes into "over-generalisations", and as such are always at least distorted. However, many stereotypes may have valid grounds and a "kernel of truth to them" (1983:75)

Seiter (1986) contends that such a definition of stereotypes differs substantially from that implicit in a great deal of mass communication research:

> Social psychologists explain stereotypes in terms of cognitive skills, as one form of mental category among many that allows us to organise information. The term does not necessarily connote falseness or a pervasion of social reality as it often does in mass communications. In its emphasis on the universality of basic cognitive process, however, the social psychologists definition obscures the ideological nature of many stereotypes (1986:16)

Seiter (1986) contends further that the definition of stereotypes used by many social psychologists today includes only a part of the meaning originally invested in the term by its coiner Lippmann (1922) who emphasized the commonsense aspect of stereotypes as well as their capacity to legimatise the status quo:

> For Lippmann (1922), stereotypes are "pictures in our heads" that we use to apprehend the world around us. They result from a useful and not necessarily undesirable "economy of effort"- this "cognitive part" of the definition has been retained by social psychologists. At best individuals would hold these "habits of thoughts" only lightly and would be ready to change them when new experience or contradictory evidence was encountered- an ability Lippmann (1922) suspected was related to education. A series of survey reports in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s used this definition to study the correlation between the belief in stereotypes and personal contact with members of stereotyped groups or the persistence of national stereotypes. Lippmann's (1922) original discussion of

> stereotypes emphasized their use *within* society, a use that was obfuscated by later studies involving different nations (1986:16).

Seiter (1922) argues that stereotypes contain an evaluation that justifies social differences and contends that the question of truth or falsity of stereotypes is immaterial for Lippmann (1922) and cannot account for their origin, which is to be found in social divisions:

> A pattern of stereotypes is not neutral. It is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a short cut. It is all these things and something more .It is the guarantee of our self respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights The stereotypes are, therefore highly charged with the feeling that are attached to them They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defences we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy (1922:96)

Seiter (1986) contends that described this way, the significance of stereotypes as an operation of an ideology becomes clear: they are full of hegemonic potential (Seiter 1986:16). Perkins (1979) suggests that stereotypes primarily function by inverting cause and effect. This viewpoint is supported by Bell (1981) and by King (1973) who argues that stereotypes about blacks often describe differences in education between blacks and whites:

> The complex, deeply entrenched factors that keep blacks from succeeding in a white dominated educational system-an effect of their subordinate position in society- is represented in the stereotype as a single, racial characteristic: blacks are less intelligent than whites *by nature.* Such stereotypes attempt to explain and justify obvious inequalities in a society whose ideology is racial equality (Bell 1981:51; King 1973:12)

Perkins (1979) employs the example of the 'irrational, illogical and inconsistent female logic' stereotype to explain this ideological process arguing that the housewife's job, for example, demands that a woman develops a variety of skills and be able to change from the performance of one skill- like housework- to another skill like childcare, very rapidly:

> What the stereotype does is to identify this feature of the woman's job, place a negative evaluation on it, and then establish it as an innate female characteristic, thus inverting its status so that it becomes a cause rather an effect. It is these features of stereotypes which explain why stereotypes appear to be false. The point is to identify their validity, because the strength of stereotypes lies in this combination of validity and distortion (Perkins 1979:154)

However Seiter (1986) argues that the 'flightiness' with women in the stereotype of female logic is, in fact, a desirable characteristic for those who must perform the job of housewife. In the stereotype, it is negatively evaluated, ascribed to nature, and used to justify women's unsuitability for other kinds of work:

> A great deal of stereotype research in social psychology has been concerned with documenting knowledge of stereotypes within a population and the persistence of belief in them-at times failing to distinguish between the two. As Brown (1965) postulates, often stereotypes are treated as simple falsities that no liberal minded and educated citizen should be guilty of entertaining (Brown 1965:170). Current definitions of stereotypes in social psychology attempt to deal with the assumptions of falseness by distinguishing between stereotypes and prejudice. Other research introduced the "kernel of truth" hypothesis to account for the persistence of stereotypes despite first person contact with the stereotyped groups. The "kernel of truth" hypothesis" fails to analyse the social origin and ideological motivations behind stereotypes and conflates their descriptive and evaluative dimensions. The implications of such an approach are profoundly reactionary (1986: 17)

Seiter (1986) says Brown's (1965) discussion of the problems with stereotype research in social psychology can especially illuminate sex role studies:

> Stereotypes are not objectionable because they are generalisations about categories; such generalisations are valuable when there are true. Stereotypes are not objectionable because they are generalisations that have been proven false; for the most part we do not know whether they are true or false – in their probabilistic forms. Stereotypes are not objectionable because they are generalisations acquired by hearsay rather than by direct experience; many generalisations acquired by hearsay are true and useful. What is objectionable then? I think it is their ethnocentrism and the implication that important traits are inborn for large groups (1965:181)

Seiter (1986) argues further that the use of word choice tests to measure respondents beliefs in stereotypes is an inadequate technique: "The adjective check list, for example, measures the association of words such as 'aggressive', 'courageous', 'fussy', 'sensitive' and 'assertive' with men or women" (Seiter 1986:17). For example, Babad (1983) argues "that male and female sex stereotypes may be defined as the constellation of psychological traits generally attributed to men and women respectively" (183:327). However Lopata and Thorne (1978) contend that that such a definition emphasises the psychological dimension of stereotype at the expense of their grounding in the social structure:

> The definition results in part from the use of the term 'sex roles', to which feminists have objected because it tends to mask questions of power and inequality. The notion of 'role' has tended to focus attention more on individuals than on social strata, more on socialisation than on social structure, and has therefore deflected attention away from historic, economic and political questions (1978:719)

Hall et al. (1982) argue that instruments such as the adjective check list dissociate personality traits from their social context, ignoring the fact that qualities such as 'assertiveness' are evaluated very differently depending on the race, class and age of the group to whom they refer and the group that makes judgement:

> The same behaviour may be evaluated as 'assertive' in the white professional or as 'bitchy' and out of line in the woman who is poor and black. Many studies of sex-role stereotypes tell us a great deal about what white middle-class students think about the psychological make-up of men and women who are white and middle-class. But they obscure the political power of stereotypes over those who may be most affected by them: poor and working class women of colour (1982:59)

In contrast to social psychologists, Noelle-Neumann (1995) posits that mass communications researchers have often used stereotypes to mean "representations of reality that are false and by implication, immoral". Noelle-Neumann (1995:332) posits that following this definition, mass communication researchers have proceeded to document the frequent appearance of stereotypes in the mass media without further clarification. Seiter (1986) takes this point further and posits that using content analysis, mass media researchers have focussed on the frequency with which women and minorities appear on television and in what roles. The results of such an approach have been startling in their indictment of television as a medium that is overwhelmingly dominated by white males:

> The origins of the stereotypes, their relationship to the social structure and their history are typically left aside in these studies, while a vague effects model is used to justify the research. Stereotypes of socially powerful groups are studied less frequently, and the relationships among individual are rarely examined – except in sex-role stereotype research which rarely focuses in the content of stereotypes based on race, class and age – This suggests that positive, "majority" stereotypes are somehow more realistic and do not warrant the kind of attention that "minority" stereotypes deserve (1986: 19).

This viewpoint is shared by Shuetz and Sprafkin (1978) who point out that blanket assumptions are often made concerning the effects of media stereotypes without drawing distinctions as to the kind of audience being referred to:

> The major concern with the presentation of stereotypes on television is that the result of such portrayals maybe the acquisition of negative attitudes towards certain groups by the audience and the solidification of sexual and racial stereotypes (1978:69).

Seiter (1986) posits further that to understand the ideological aspects of stereotypes in the mass media, media researchers must look at their evaluative as well as their descriptive aspects: "For example, stereotypes usually describe all women in terms of their personal relationships to men and in terms of their sexuality, while white men are rarely described

in this way" (Seiter 1986:19). This viewpoint is corroborated by Perkins (1969) who explains that:

> There is a male (he-man) stereotype, an upper class stereotype (leader). These stereotypes are important because other stereotypes are partially defined in terms of, or in opposition to, them. The happy-go-lucky Negro attains at least some its meaning and force from its opposition to the "puritan" characteristics –sombre and responsible of the *WASP*. Positive stereotypes are an important part of ideology and are important in the socialisation of both dominant and oppressed groups. In order to focus attention on the ideological nature of stereotypes, it might be more useful to talk of pejorative stereotypes and laudatory stereotypes, rather to conceal the 'pejorativeness' in the meaning of the term (1969: 144).

Seiter (1986) warns that if media researchers fail to examine the evaluative as well as the descriptive components of stereotypes, there is a danger of mistaking the *presence* of white, bourgeois values for the *absence* of stereotypes, and, therefore, for more true and realistic representations:

> Professional achievement, ambition, puritanism, and individualism may be heralded as components of new "positive images" of white women and of men and women of colour. But such representations may obscure economically based social divisions and circumvent the recognition of shared experiences of oppression. Television content analysis should be scrutinized in terms of this kind of ethnocentrism, especially since so many studies use white college students as coders (1986:20)

Seiter (1986) argues further that agendas for 'progress' in television representation need to be similarly analyised as many quantitative studies of television content conclude with conspicuously weak statements about the need for greater diversification of character types. Seeger (1995) and Hafen and Hannonen-Gladden (1981) agree that while a plea is sometimes made for more democratic representations where the population of television characters reflect American audience demographics across ethnic; "the phenomenal degree of integration which has been achieved in America has not become as visible as it could" (Seeger 1995:3; Hafen and Hannonen-Gladden 1981:377). However Seiter (1986) notes that this line of argument is neutralised by the rejoinder that the commercial industry is interested in a market of white, young, middle-class consumers (1986:20).

Taken together the foregoing viewpoints are significant and relevant to this study as they fundamentally articulate why stereotypes are an objectionable system of representing women in television news. Particularly objectionable is the use of sex-role stereotypes to represent women in television news as such stereotypes tend to distort reality by masking questions of distribution of power and inequality between men and women in society. The use of sex-role stereotypes as a way of representing women is also objectionable because sex-role stereotypes tend focus more attention on the individual woman rather than paying more attention on the social strata, socialisation and the social structure; the end result of which is to deflect focus away from historic, economic and political conditions under which women live their lives. In the final instance sex-role stereotypes

are objectionable because of their fundamentally gendered or discriminatory nature and their implied narrative that certain characteristics are inborn in women.

2.1.5 Objectification of women

The study also considers it very important to discuss the 'objectification of women' in media texts as it views it as a particularly negative stereotype but one that is nonetheless useful in understanding the media's treatment of women. The study conceives of 'objectification of women' as the portrayal of women as physical objects that can be looked at and acted upon while at the same time "failing to portray them as subjective beings with thoughts, histories and emotions" (Rockler-Gladen 2008:1). However Rockler-Gladen (2008) also points out that in reality, human beings are both objects and subjects as they are essentially physical collections of molecules as well as subjective individual beings: and note that "to objectify someone then, is to exclusively reduce her to the level of a physical object; so when women are represented in the news media as passive and demonstrate no other attributes aside from their physical or sexual being, that is objectification" (Rockler-Gladen 2008:1). Bartky (1990) and LeMoncheck (1997) agree that sexual objectification occurs when a person is seen as a sexual object and "their sexual attributes and physical attractiveness are separated from the rest of their personalities and existence as individuals and reduced to instruments of pleasure for other people" (Bartky 1990:26; LeMoncheck 1997:133).

What these discussions show is that media theorists are divided about the extent to which the objection of women in media content leads to social problems such as violence and sexual abuse against women. Rockler-Gladen (2008) argues that when women are constantly portrayed as objects without subjectivity, it may be easier for some men to justify using violence against them: "if a woman is just a thing to be looked at, her feelings and concerns might seem less important" (2008:2). Barry (1994) and LeMoncheck (1997) add that sexual stereotyping is objectionable because it plays an important role in the perpetuation of gender inequality (1994:247; 1997:133).

Other media theorists like Fredrickson (1997) and Hewstone (2004) argue that sexual objection of women in the news media can give women negative self- image because of the belief that their intelligence and competence are not being acknowledged. Lee (1994) argues that "a diet of objectification might lead young girls to attach so much importance to physical appearance that they might experience feelings of fear, shame and disgust as they grow into adult women because they sense that they are becoming more visible to society as sexual objects" (1994:343). The APA Task Force on the Sexualisation of Girls (2007) argues that young women are especially susceptible to sexual objection of women in the news media because they are often made to understand that power, respect and wealth can be derived from one's outward appearance. Kilbourne (2000) and Faludi (2006) argue that the influx of objectified images of women in the news media serves as a

backlash against women becoming too powerful because it comes at the same time that women have gained some powers in society.

Byerly and Ross (2008) also believe that the objectification of women in media texts may trigger social problems especially violence against them. Byerly and Ross (2008) posit that women appear to be at their most interesting for the news media when they are in most pain or when they experience the most suffering: "These frames of women as victims of violence often focus on the fragile female form and her vulnerability to violation by men" (2008:43). Byerly and Ross (2008) argue further that women who are represented as targets of male violence in the news media are routinely described as 'victims', placing them as eternally passive and dependent, their lives entirely circumscribed by the whim of men:

> Identikit pictures of assailants are captioned with 'sex monster' or 'fiend' labels which distances these men from the ordinary variety, implying that normal men do not do these things, only beasts and maniacs. In the United Kingdom, the law was changed in 1993 in order for a young man under the age of 14 years to be convicted of rape, and the media carried reports that suggested that 'the public' was concerned at legislation that would criminalise children, as if adolescents are not capable of criminal and violent acts. The framing of sexual assaults as 'unusual occurrences' carried out by 'unnatural men' encourages the view that such crimes are both rare and the result of individual pathology that requires a law and order response rather than constituting a serious social problem that requires a social reform solution (2008:42).

This study accepts Byerly and Ross (2008)'s explanation of why it is problematic for the media to frame sexual assaults in psychological or individual terms rather than inviting audiences to understand the social triggers of violence and discrimination against women in their broader social, political and economic contexts. Such focus on the individual tends to deflect attention away from the social causes of issues that are important to women including rape, domestic drudgery, patriarchy or male oppression and the inadequacy of laws meant to protect women. As O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) have pointed out:

> If a media text stresses social causes to problem faced by women, then the text's answers to these problems will be in terms of social issues and contexts; but if the media text stresses psychological causes to problems faced by women, then the text's answers will be to work on people's individual characters and the social problems will become a background to psychological problems. This is particularly significant in relation to how audiences are invited to understand media texts that represent crime and criminality. If the text represents criminals as produced by social forces and if the text focuses primarily on these forces, then the logic of the story is that society needs to change to solve these crime problems. If, however crimes are committed by psychological deviant individuals who need to change their characters, then the solution suggested by the text is that the individual must change. Social issues then recede into the background as individual issues are foregrounded (2005:133).

O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2005) posit further that these patterns of representation necessarily lead consumers to grapple with the question of social or psychological determination of media texts:

> The question we need to ask is: 'what makes as individuals act the way we do; what determines our actions?' We can split determining causes into two broad areas: external forces - social forces brought to bear on us - and internal forces - how we psychologically respond to events. Clearly these two forms of causal factors are linked to each other. For instance the psychological character of an individual is not given at birth. While we have inherent qualities and abilities, these are influenced by outside forces that are specific to each individual person such as the treatment we receive from our parents and the kind of places, people, opportunities and experiences we encounter as we grow up (2005:131).

Further, while there is no conclusive evidence in this study to support Fredrickson (1997) and Hewstone (2004) views are that a constant diet of objectification images tends to justify violence against women by men and the internalisation of negative self-images by younger women; the dominance of objectified images of women in the research material surveyed tend to corroborate Kilbourne (2000) and Faludi (2006)'s theory that is a backlash against women becoming top powerful because it comes at time when women have gained significant political power in society.

2.2 Theories of news production

Seaton (1997) postulates that theories of news production are useful in providing an explanation of the choices and processes of the construction of news or media texts; which is the primary area of interest of this study. Tuchman (2002) posits that news is not an unmediated presentation of information by journalists but rather "journalists should literally be seen as producing news in the context of organisational and other social frameworks" (2002:78). Schudson (2000) argues that journalists mistrust, misunderstand and often take offence when social scientists speak of 'constructing the news' 'making the news' and the 'social construction of reality' in reference to the work that journalists do. Schudson (2000) points further that such definition of news propel journalists into a fierce defence of their work on the grounds that they just "report the world as they see it - the facts and nothing but the facts - and yes while there is the occasional bias, sensationalism or inaccuracy - a responsible journalist never fakes the news" (2000: 87).

According to other media theorists: "news is what newspapermen make it" (Gieber 1964:173); others argue that "news is the result of the methods that news workers employ" (Fishman 1980:14) and yet others argue that "news is manufactured by journalists" (Cohen and Young 1973:97).

According to Tuchman (1976) many media theorists - herself included - respond to journalists' defensiveness by pointing out that they never meant to say journalists 'fake the news' but rather that journalist 'make the news'. Tuchman (1978) explains that to say that a news report is a story - no more but a less - is "not to demean the news, nor to accuse it of being fictitious; rather to alerts us that news, like all public documents is a constructed reality possessing its own internal validity" (1976:97). Theories of news production also "consider media structures as part of society, focusing on political, economic, organisational and professional elements affecting news production" (McNair 1998:81; Schudson 2000:175). This study therefore conceives of the process of news production as a representation of reality. Although Curran (2000a) argues that theories of news are a sister discipline to the critical political economy of the media, this study will not consider issues of media ownership and the profit motive because the SABC is a publicly owned media institution that is not designed for profit. In contrast, as shown by Schudson (2000), theories of news production are particularly relevant for this study because "this is where sources, journalists, editors, news organisations, competing demands of professionalism, the market-place and cultural traditions collect around specific choices of what news to report and how to report it" (2000:175) confirming the approach that news is always a process of selection and construction as argued by Tuchman (1978), Louw (2001) and Manning (2001).

2.2.1 Political factors

McNair (1998) postulates that in an ideal world, journalists should be able to do their work without any interference from people in positions of power. However McNair (1998) concedes that in the real world, political factors exist that posit "a certain amount of regulation, control and constraint on the profession thereby imposing a hegemonic influence on the process of news construction" (1998:82). Hachten (1979) posits that political factors impacting on the process of news production are not only a function of the type of political system in place in a country but are also determined by the political history of a given country (1979:62). For example, Hachten (1979) argues that South Africans had to wait for 25 years – until January 1976 - to experience their first ever television news bulletins because the government of the day was still debating the perils of that evil black box:

> The protracted, 25-year delay was due mainly to the fear within the ruling National Party that the black box would release unsettling forces on what is euphemistically called the "South African way of life". The Calvinistic Afrikaners have long perceived numerous dangers in television: a threat to the Afrikaans language and culture because of the expected heavy dependence on American and British-produced programmes; the potential psychological and political impact of television on urbanised blacks, politically powerless and held in economic subjugation by the apartheid system; and the possible undermining of traditional values and morals of Afrikanerdom and its Dutch Reformed Church (1979:62).

Today as Dunleavy and O'Leary (1987) and Heywood (2002) have shown, most of the international world "aligns with the ideals of a liberal democracy, namely a capitalist, market-based economy, with much focus on meeting the interest of the individual within society through a representative government" (Dunleavy and O'Leary 1987:239; Heywood 2002:66). McNair (1998) explains that liberal democratic societies project their focus on the individual to the news media, its roles and functions within the system, resulting in a modest level of "political control of the media and a high degree of tolerance amongst political elites for the unwelcome and critical things that journalists in such a system will write and say" (1998:84). Curran (2000b) adds that in liberal democratic societies, "the media is also an independent player in the market-based economy, thereby ensuring that it remains independent from government interference" (Curran 2000b:212).

However as Mills and Hughes (2002) point out, media institutions in Africa operate under political conditions that are markedly different from those found in liberal democracies and that are largely shaped by colonial histories and transitions to statehood. Legum (1971), Kariithi et al (1994) and Strelitz (2005) agree that upon achieving statehood, African governments focus on creating national unity and promoting development but "do so within media structures they know best - those left behind of their former colonisers" (Legum 1971:153; Kariithi 1994 et al.1994:63; Strelitz 2005:39). Langa (2006) adds that most African governments see state control of media institutions as the only way of achieving political success. The SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) - which is a central focus of this study - is a case in point as shown by Hachten (1979) who argues that because of the SABC's special relationship to the government – apparently independent but run by a government-appointed board – the news shows have a certain official stodginess:

> As a channel for the dissemination of the government line, the SABC does have an access to the President and other cabinet ministers that is not enjoyed by the rest of the media. In fact, a good portion of the news shows is given over to high government officials providing official explanation to sympathetic reporters (1979:67).

Many South African based media commentators including Langa (2006) believe that the above remarks about apartheid era political forces affecting news production at the SABC then can be equally applied to the way post-apartheid political forces affect news production at the SABC today (Langa 2006:14).

2.2.2 Economic factors

Burton (2005) argues that advertising revenue is easily the most critical economic force affecting patterns of news construction today. Burton (2005) adds that the relationship between media operations and advertising revenue today is so interdependent that it could be called "symbiotic and has led to questions about how far media content represents the interests of advertisers and the ideology of the marketplace" (2005:18). Cowling (2009) argues that the relationship between advertisers and the SABC is rather unique and

interesting because while the SABC's Annual Report 2008-2009 shows that the public broadcaster is 82% dependent on private advertising revenue, the official stodginess of its news bulletins is staggering. Hachten (1979) points out that historically, the economics of news production at the SABC have largely been influenced by the cost of technological roll-out:

> The country did not have the telecommunications infrastructure to broadcast nationally until the Post Office installed microwaves relays in the 1960s, which provided the necessary channel capacity. In addition the SABC went to Frequency Modulated (FM) broadcasting in the 1960s and this meant that the FM transmitting antennas could also carry television. Before that it could have been too expensive to set up channels and transmitter sites solely for television. Still, it was a number of years between attainment of technological capability and the start of television news broadcasting (1979:62).

Economically driven technological developments that are also likely to affect news construction at the SABC in the near future are the planned migration from the current analogue broadcasting technology to digital broadcasting in about three years time (SABC Annual Report 2008-2009; Department of Communication 2009). The study will conceive of adjustments made to news operations to accommodate external economic interests as organisational and professional issues of news production.

2.2.3 Organisational and professional factors

Murdock (2000) postulates that newsroom managers and journalists play key roles in the process of news production in media institutions. Murdock (2000) argues that these key editorial personnel are not only affected by broader political and economic factors in their work, but also by their organisations' strategic business objectives. Allan (1999) agrees further that the profit orientation that results from onerous obligations imposed on editorial personnel by shareholders, directors and financiers to adjust news operations to business strategies; is another key filter shaping news coverage" (1999:58). Schudson (2000) postulates that media content is also shaped by methods of news gathering and production processes. Gans (1980) explains that while editorial personnel are allowed certain latitude to do their work, they can never be absolutely objective because as individuals they bring their own values to the process of news selection and production. It is in the context of this last point that McCombs (1988) asks how much of the news content made available to audiences by media institutions is actually determined by the "traditions, practices and beliefs of journalists regardless of the ownership structure?" (1988:129). This study will discuss organisational and professional factors affecting news production in the context of the main tools used by media institutions in the process.

2.2.3.1 News selection

A number of media theorists also postulate that "in selecting and rejecting news stories, an element of bias is introduced in the final news output" (Watson and Hill 2000:213; Shoemaker and Reese 1991:93; Golding and Murdock 1997:495). Watson and Hill (2000) postulate that "bias in news construction refers to the slanted or one-sided presentation of information as well as to the values, beliefs and traditions that news producers bring to the process" (2000:213). Golding and Murdock (1997) argue that an important way in which bias continuously forms part of media content is through news values. Golding and Murdock (1997) explain that news values refer to "guidelines for the presentation of items, suggesting what to emphasise, what to omit, and where to give priority in the preparation of the items for presentation to the audience" (1997:495). Shoemaker and Reese (1991) posit that media institutions use news value within a process known as gatekeeping to guide them in deciding which information – from a myriad of a day's events – should be omitted; and which information should be disseminated to their audiences. Galtung and Ruge (1965) postulate that the main elements making up news values include "frequency, threshold, unambiguity, meaningfulness, consonance, unexpectedness, continuity, and composition, reference to elite nations and/or persons, personalisation and negativity" (1965:179). McNair (1998) adds that the foregoing elements form the criteria that media texts should have in order to be selected for dissemination.

However O'Sullivan et al (1994) argue that within the above criteria, "priority is still given to stories about politics, business, economics, international affairs and war" (1994:203). Joseph and Sharma (2006) agree that perceptions of what constitutes news are among the most important determinants of coverage with "events and issues involving politics, economics, law and religion - in that order - invariably at the top of the ladder of newsworthiness" (2006:64). Joseph and Sharma (2006) argue further that the dominant notions of what constitutes news also privilege certain news categories over others and explain that:

> According to generally accepted definitions, events rather than processes make news. A violent episode merits front-page coverage while a peaceful state of affairs is not considered nearly as important. The magnitude of the event, whether in terms of the area affected or the number of people involved, also determines its importance as news. An unusual, out of the ordinary event - of the man bites dog variety - is concerned newsworthy, whereas normal, everyday life attracts less notice. By conventional standards, people can also make news - but not all people. The activities of the wealthy and powerful rate more highly than those of the poor and marginalised, including women. The opinions of the dominant sections of society are given more weight, and therefore more coverage (2006: 65).

McQuail (2000) explains that such approaches mean that certain events will be focused upon by the news media at the same time that other events will be ignored by it. McNair (1998) argues further that "if news values can be viewed as an expression of social values, then the news values prevailing in liberal democracies refer to a world that is gendered, ethno-centric, elite-oriented and focused on negative events" (1998: 79). The foregoing remarks confirm this study's approach that media texts do not simply reflect a reality out there but rather construct or mediate it through a process of selection and gatekeeping that is also heavily influenced by the social values that media personnel bring to the news production process.

2.2.3.2 News frames

Shoemaker (1997) makes the link between news values and the actual message of the event selected for dissemination by the news media arguing that "once selected, certain aspects of a message are retained, at the same time that other aspects of the same message are omitted" (1997:633). Other media theorists explain that news values are first used as selection for events and are then replaced by "news frames which assist in structuring the stories for the audience" (Tuchman 1978:165; Gamson; Croteau, Hoynes and Sasson 1992). Tuchman (1978) and White (1979) argue further that "journalists use news frames to further categorise media content" (1978:165; 1979:194). Norris (1997a:30) postulates that 'news frames' are interpretive; value-laden structures that allow a news story to be described:

> News frames are ritualised ways of understanding the world, of presenting a reality that both excludes and includes and both emphasizes and plays down certain facts. News frames constitute highly orchestrated ways of understanding social and gender relations and encourage ways of seeing and interpreting the world in a manner that preserves the male-dominated status quo (Norris 1997a in Byerly and Ross 2006: 41).

Gitlin (1980) agrees that news frames are "principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens and what matters" (1980:86). Other theorists point out that the repeated use of frames in constructing news stories "eventually lead to a 'natural' process of selection and omission of information pertaining to that type of story, indicating that certain constructions will be continually perpetuated" (Tuchman 1978:165; Hartley 1982:199, Oosthuizen 2001:84). The news frames that are central to the study include the gender of sources informing news coverage; news as a masculine narrative; and the themes and discourse inherent in the patterns of representation of women in television news.

2.2.3.3 Sources

Manning (2001) argues that an analysis of sources used in news production is a critical area of media research because:

> Central to the study of news sources is an understanding of the way in which both structures and dynamic social practices shape the flow of information generated by news source activity and the needs of news organisations. The power relations shaping information flows between news sources and news operations involve both instrumental and structural dimensions but their analysis has to be located in specific historical contexts (2000:49).

For Soloski (1977), sources informing news are "drawn from existing power structures; hence news tends to support the status quo" (1997:144). McNair (1998), Curran (2000a) and Davies (2008) agree with this argument postulating that most sources are institutional and belong to elite groups within society. Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) agree that elite groups in society "form part of the authoritative domain within which many issues that are reported upon in the media fall" (2000:13). Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) argue further that it is in this way that the dominant ideology of society – which Gurevitch and Blumler (2000) also categorise as a subtle method of control used by media organisations to further their interests – will be continually perpetuated. Van Ginneken (1998) also agrees that "certain sources have the power to set some of the media's agenda, and certain have the power to set some of the public's agenda" (1998:87).

Similarly Shoemaker and Reese (1996) postulate that most news is about people who are already prominent:

> For a 'non-person' to be covered, often requires that he or she does something deviant such as demonstrating or breaking the law. Most news comes from official sources, which are primarily governmental channels but journalists can only use these sources when they are available. Government and business sources are most accessible to journalists, often preparing events or information specifically for journalists. Individual sources or representatives of small groups are less accessible to journalists and may not be skilled in getting their messages out. Among television characters, there are more people with high-status than low-status jobs and in general, portrayals in media reflect the power relations of the general society (1996: 93).

Hall et al (1978), Allan (1999) and Schudson (2003) postulate further that the more powerful the source, the more likely it will be used in the news production process. MacGregor (1997) and van Ginneken (1998) agree that as a result of such tendencies,

"sources most often used in news are those with authority, credibility and are easily available" (1997:1; 1998:166). Herman and Chomsky (1988) argue that sources considered as authoritative by the news media are usually "government and expert sources, by virtue of being recognisable and credible because of their status and prestige" (1988:19). Manning (2001) argues further that by being easily accessible; these authoritative sources also ensure that they become the "most utilised voices on news events while at the same legitimatising journalists' claims to objectivity" (2001:69). Van Ginneken (1998), Allan (1999) and Louw (2001) also postulate that as a result of these approaches most news sources are either "official sources or experts of some sort, namely government officials and spokespersons, as well as academics, policymakers and others deemed to be experts in a specific field" (van Ginneken 1998:166; Allan 1999:64; Louw 2001:5). Such sources as mentioned above are also known as "primary definers of news" (Hall et al.1978:59).

Manning (2001) postulates that the constant use of certain sources creates "a powerful frame within which news is constructed and circulated" (2001:68). MacGregor (1997:1) agrees that a critical consequence of constantly using the same sources in news is that "certain representations are perpetuated especially as they become dominant within media content" (1997:1). Shoemaker (1991) also postulates that the exclusive use of accessible and authoritative sources "creates another process of gatekeeping because sources either assist or restrict the flow of information through the paths they manage, which in turn affects the introduction of certain information into the media" (1991:124).

2.2.3.4 News as a masculine narrative

Rakow and Kranich (1991) postulate that if an analysis of media texts were to take the "gendered nature of news as a masculine narrative as its starting point" (Rakow and Kranich 1991:8) it will find that "when women appear in news as sources or subjects, they will always represent 'woman' in a ritualised role; and feminist voices are usually shown as mainstream designees of a seemingly homogeneous female viewpoint" (Rakow and Kranich 1991:8). Other media theorists also agree that women are marginalised by the news media because news functions as a masculine genre, circulating meanings that in general confirm and conserve existing social and economic relationships (Hartley 1982; Manoff and Schudson 1987:246; Carey 1988:680).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) postulate that to better understand what is happening when women appear in the news, it is useful to "connect theoretical developments in the field of communication concerning the nature of news with theoretical developments about women's representation in the news media" (1991:9). Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue further that an understanding of news should essentially begin with its gendered nature as a masculine narrative in which women function not as speaking subjects but as signs because "any improvements in women's treatment in the news will require not simply more coverage or women employing more women journalists as argued by van Zoonen

(1988) but a fundamental change in news as a narrative genre (1991:9). Hartley (1982) defines a sign as any item which can produce a meaning:

> A sign comprises a signifier - the sound image such as 'tree' and the signified – the concept with which it is associated. The meaning of a sign does not depend on the actual or the real behind the word, since both the word and the concept are arbitrary and culture bound. On the contrary, the meaning of a sign is determined by its relationship to other signs in the sign system, defined, in other words, by what it is not (1982:11)

Cowie (1978) expands on the above discussion and argues that the sign 'woman' has meaning not because it refers to some real, pre-given entity that the word tags along but because it is different from another sign 'man'. Cowie (1978) adds that "it is therefore possible, to see 'woman' not as a given biologically or psychologically, but as a category produced in signifying practices" (1978:60). Other media theorists postulate that "news sources that function as signs are bearers of meaning in a well orchestrated discourse (Barkin and Gurevitch 1987:1; Campbell and Reeves 1989:21). However Rakow and Kranich (1991) contend that since women are found so infrequently in news stories, and since they always sign as 'woman' – unlike men who do not ordinarily carry meaning as 'man' and because culture assumes maleness as given – women's function as sign is unique (1991:13).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) distinguish at least five categories in which women function as carriers rather than creators of meaning in news. First, Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue that as 'signs of the times', women are used to illustrate the private consequences of public events and actions:

> Women are used as sources in the capacity of institutionally unaffiliated individuals located in the private sphere serve to illustrate the consequences, emotions, or behaviours that underlie a story. These women are not sources of information, as sources generally function but specimens: here is what a woman who abuses her children looks like and how, now repentant, she gets help and the social order is restored, here are society's most vulnerable members – wives, mothers, daughters, sisters – emotionally buffeted about by political and uncaring actions of governments; here is an ordinary woman who fled her home in an earthquake. These women are used to make a connection between the private sphere of – home, family, emotions, neighbourhood and personal experience and the public sphere of politics, policy, and authority – including the authority to restore and provide assistance. In most stories women used as sources are not themselves part of the public debate or conflict. They are instead called in as evidence to support one side of the argument or one interpretation of a problem. This is most obvious when a woman is the mother or sister of a hostage or spy or military casuality. Although she may indeed have an opinion on the situation, her on camera appearance lets her neither join the argument nor approach a solution. Her appearance is a ritualised – contained and safe – representation of how the actions of those in the public sphere affect those in the private sphere (1991: 16).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) cite a news story on NBC (July 2, 1986) to further illustrate the above point:

> Two battered women appear on camera in a story about changes in police approaches to domestic violence. A city official and two police department spokespersons – all men – also appear as sources. Men's battering of women is not the central issue of the story; it is about the jurisdiction of public officials over the private sphere. The battered women are used to lend support to the position that public officials should assume jurisdiction in this area – though the economic feasibility of doing so is questioned (1991: 16).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) contend that the fact that women are used as a sign in this way cannot be explained simply by reference to news routines:

> Reporters and editors make conscious decisions about which sources will be used, and how. Eliasoph's (1988) oppositional journalistic practices at KPFA illustrate how women can speak as individuals rather than signs. Instead of getting some "heartbreaking tape from refugees" as she was assigned, Eliasoph (1988) taped the speech of a refugee offering a political analysis of the situation, eschewing the sign position accorded to the discursive group 'refugee' by the anchor in favour of a speaking position for an active human subject (1991:16).

Second, Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue that women are also used as 'signs of support' to endorse an action or policy because of their organisational or institutional affiliations:

> On the occasions when women do appear as speaking subjects in the public debate of a news story, generally they speak not for women but for organisations and institutions – many of which, feminists would argue, oppress women or advocate policies or actions against women's best interests. In the study of NBC broadcasts of July 1986, 12 women represented government agencies and six represented businesses or trade associations – women did not represent labour in any stories though two the women were workers. So for example, Christie Hefner of Playboy Enterprises spoke against the Meese Pornography Commission findings, and other women spoke for the banking industry – defending mortgage – for the American Enterprise Institute – criticizing foreign government – and for the US Treasury – noting the sale of US liberty coins. Like women newscasters, the women who appear in stories of this kind have their subject positions as women invoked by their appearance, but their voices as women are denied. In other words, they function as women but do not speak as women. Because so few women appear on cameras at all, it is important to ask why a woman is chosen to represent an organisation, when she is chosen to. It may be the luck of the draw or a bona fide part of her job, an indication that women are making progress moving into the management ranks of organisations. Conversely, organisations and institutions may use women to make a position more palatable or to diffuse the strength of an argument that women might make against them (1991:17).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) cite the example of telecommunication company A.T&T that used a woman from its health affairs department to explain its policy of transferring pregnant women out of jobs dealing with hazardous chemicals (CBS, February 16, 1987):

> Her defence of A.T&T's policy contrasts with suggestions made by other sources that chemicals may harm non women and men as well, that transferring pregnant workers punishes them with lower wages, and that companies may men rather than women to avoid the problem. Even though she is not speaking *for* women, in such a case the spokesperson may be intentionally chosen to speak *because* she is a (credible) woman who can diffuse criticism of a corporate policy. We do not mean to imply that these would see themselves as being used but rather that we know little about the strategies of gender that accompany institutional decisions about spokespersons. We also contend that because a woman always carries as her primary meaning the sign "woman", a woman's appearance cannot carry the same meaning as if a meaning appeared in her place (1991:17).

Thirdly, Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue that women who are allowed to speak for women are represented by the news media as 'unusual signs' or 'feminists':

> As illustrated by the story about men's battering of women, even those stories that could be expected to have women speaking for women generally do not. In order for a woman to occupy a position as a speaking subject who speaks *for women,* she must signify a 'feminist', a particular and unusual kind of 'woman'. But feminists who do appear on television screens generally represent liberal mainstream feminism that advocates equal opportunities for women within the existing hierarchical social structure. Radical, socialist and post-culturists feminists advocated deep changes in the social structure beginning with men's relation to women (radical feminists), material conditions and economic relations (socialist feminists), or the ordering of symbolic systems (post-culturalist feminists). But since only one feminist generally appears in a news story, the implication is that feminism is a homogeneous ideological position, that there is only one way to frame the problem under discussion, and that only someone designated as a feminist is aware of and dissatisfied with women's place.
>
> Her ritualised appearance gives the illusion that the news organisation has fulfilled its obligation to provide balance and expert testimony. The absence of women as speaking subjects means in that the vast majority of news stories lack a critical analysis of issues affecting women – particularly in the light of the fact that men as well are rarely invited to speak on women's behalf An ABC story on the sex selection of children (September 29, 1986) made only passing reference to the possibility that couples will chose boys over girls. Rather, the procedure was framed as controversial about its scientific validity and the ethics of tampering with "nature". The controversy was debated by three male doctors and two male sources for sex selection companies.
>
> A CBS story (February 24, 1987) on welfare reform did not use ant women or feminist sources. The story was three minutes long which is lengthy by television standards and five men appeared on the screen, all politicians. When ABC aired a 20-scond story (September 14, 1986) announcing that Kelly Cash had been crowned Miss America, no feminists were called upon to discuss white standards

> of beauty in the United Sates or the problematic aspects of beauty competitions. Instead a reporter asked Cash about her opinion about abortion and women's rights. It is possible that that the reporter was trying to turn Cash from a sign as a sexual object into a speaking object for women. More likely, however, the reporter was looking for a controversial angle to the story – which has been standard in pageant coverage in recent years or for the kind of evidence displayed prominently by the news media in the past decade that 'real women' do not support feminism, thus preserving the critical purity of the real sign women (1991: 17).

Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue further that another way the purity of the sign 'woman' is maintained is by homogeneity of appearance:

> In the realms of fiction and advertising, age, height, weight and body proportion, facial features and clothing can be carefully selected, controlled or altered to achieve the broadly similar look of contemporary sexual beauty that clearly marks the sign 'woman' and that serves to differentiate women from men. In broadcast news, which is presented as a 'slice of real life', the physical appearance of women appearing as newsmakers and as sources, is more difficult to control. Those women who are assigned and who take up the identity 'woman' differ greatly in their experiences and material conditions, but these differences are denied and hidden in favour of a shared and overriding 'similarity' – women's essential and intractable difference from men (1991:19).

Finally Rakow and Kranich (1991) argue that when women's actions disrupt the social order, they are represented as part of the 'nature of the sign' – an inherent part of all women's personalities:

> Despite the attempt to preserve the purity of the sign 'woman', women do threaten the boundaries of differentiation and do challenge the order of things; one way to re-contain the disorderliness and preserve the meaning of the sign is to attribute the conflicts raised by women's dissatisfaction with their social place to an essential personality trait of woman. This explains the emphasis on conflict that feminists have documented in news treatment of women and the women's movement. All women may be alike, according to the meaning attributed to the sign 'woman' but that does not mean they can get along with each other or work together. Television news is not a reflection of society but an instance of it, locating women inside and outside the screen in discourse that assigns the meaning of the sign 'woman' even while invoking it s if it were already there. The solution of this problem of woman as sign in television news must be a radical one; the problem may even be impossible to solve. Can the masculine narrative of news be 'feminised' more basically, can the symbolic system that posits women as objects of men' exchange be altered? These are questions to which communication scholars and journalist interested in understanding news need to turn their attention to (1991: 20).

Tuchman (1978) argues that the marginalisation of women voices in news discourse amounts to their 'symbolic annihilation' by the news media. Tuchman (1978) explains that the 'symbolic annihilation of women in news' refers to a 'combination of the condemnation, trivialisation and erasure' of women in news discourse. Joseph and Sharma (2006) argue that the 'symbolic annihilation of women in news discourse' means that the invisibility and inaudibility of women in news discourse is perpetuated and enhanced by the news media.

Byerly and Ross (2006) argue that what any discussion of women's representation in news demonstrates incontrovertibly is that the news media's framing of women highly restricted and mostly negative ways is not simply the consequence of the idiosyncrasies of this newspaper, that Television channel or that radio station but rather that it is a global phenomenon that has endured over time and media form and continues to do so:

> The most common way for women to feature in news stories is as victims especially of sexual crimes through the repetitive framing of woman as victim, woman as object and woman as body. This particular frame is routinised and normalized, endlessly recycled to protect the status quo - men on top again, and women beneath in every sense. Women remain less than the sum of their body parts (2006: 54).

Joseph and Sharma (2006) assert that the event orientation, as opposed to the process orientation of many issues of special concern to women; results in most of them being neglected by the news media. This is in line with the generally accepted paradigm that events, rather than processes make news:

> A number of serious women's issues are not overly violent or dramatic, and although often involving large numbers, the affected persons are not necessarily part of a readily identifiable group or concentrated in a particular geographical area. Further, many aspects of women's oppression are so commonplace and widely accepted that they are not considered sufficiently extraordinary to merit coverage. This is reflected in the kind of women's issues which receive attention from the media. Violent crimes against women receive more coverage than less gruesome but no less debilitating forms of oppression (2006: 65).

Joseph and Sharma (2006) argue further that the unquestioning acceptance of the foregoing definitions of news affect the coverage of women and issues of special concern to women in the news media. This is because most women are neither affluent, influential nor in positions of authority and dominance (2006: 65). Edstrom (2008) reflects on what it would take to make women's lives newsworthy:

> There tends to be a correlation between gender equality in society and gender representation in the media. The media tends to interview people with power. Women are often underrepresented in power positions. But that is not enough to explain the absence of women as news subjects. Other power structures within a society; its social and cultural history; the media logic of the editorial rooms, the

> expectations of the audiences; are things that can also contribute or prohibit women's participation in the media (Edstrom 2008: 1).

Molotch (1978) agrees and postulates that women are not in control of society's institutions. Molotch (1978) argues further that "traditional dependence by the media for spokesmen – literally - from the top of such institutions means that the sexism which blocks women's mobility in other realms accumulates preventing women from even knowing that they exist as a public phenomenon" (1978:38).

Rabe (2004) postulates that since the first dissertation on what constitutes news was written in 1890, the question, *Ecquid Novi* - what is news? - was always answered according to the male standard of what constitute news:

> News in 1890 was the birth and death of princes, the death of famous men and the end of notorious men. But the media shapes society with every image, every sound and every word that it broadcasts or publishes. We therefore need to accept our responsibility as an institution that has the power only to change attitudes but actions as well. Therefore our news values need to recognise 'women's issues' as societal issues as well (2004: 61).

Byerly and Ross (2006) argue further that when challenged, journalists will often say they don't cover stories focused on women politicians because there are relatively few women in positions of authority, either in government or in opposition parties:

> Although this is becoming less true, it is nonetheless seen as a legitimate excuse for marginalizing women's voices. However what is less excusable is the ways in which journalists, either through laziness, tight deadlines or any other reason they put forward, use the same sources as expert commentators on other news subjects. How journalists gather news, who they use as sources and then which quotes from those sources they actually incorporate into their stories, all combine to produce a "constructed version of reality", both of the particular news story, or more broadly, of a type of society (2006: 47).

Manning (2001) agrees and points out that:

> given what has become conventional wisdom about news sourcing more general, journalists tend to use people like themselves who share the same opinion and will not use quotes with which they disagree with in their own reports: source selection - meaning choosing men as sources of news - becomes more explicable. As most journalists are men and most politicians and/or leaders and/or senior executives are also men, then a male-ordered cycle is repeated endlessly in this buddy-buddy world (Manning 2001 in Byerly and Ross 2006: 47).

Zoch and VanSlyke Turk (1998) postulate that news stories featuring women and the female source's actual contribution tend to be significantly less than that of men:

> Since the length is the cue that journalists give to the importance of a story - longer is more important - it appears then, that men are quoted more frequently in the longer, more important stories and are trusted more than women to give the longer, more in-depth quote (1998: 769).

However Hernandez (1995) and Ross (1995) argue that if there are relatively few nuclear scientists and the current news debate is around nuclear testing, sourcing mostly men as experts has logic:

> But what about when the views of ordinary men and women on the streets are being canvassed? Surely here there is absolutely no reason why similar numbers of men and women should not be asked to comment on the issue of the day, especially at times when opinion polls results are constantly quoted in the media such as during general elections. In studies that focus specifically on the incorporation of the public into news and political discourse and those that look at the gender dimension of who is asked to speak, show that men are more likely to be invited to speak than women (1995:157; 1995a:78).

Chapter Three

Methods

Introduction

This study will conceive media texts or content as representations of reality for the purpose of analysing the treatment of women in television news. Further, the study will conceive 'media texts' or 'media content' as referring to "anything written, visual or spoken that serves as a medium of communication" (Noelle-Neumann 1991:24). The study will use content analysis to explore patterns of representation of women in television news. However while quantitative content analysis is suitable for investigating large amounts of media texts or content in a "systematic and quantitative manner" (Wimmer and Dominick 1994:164); as a method "it is limited in its ability to produce complete readings or interpretations of media texts" (Shoemaker and Reese 1932:32). Shoemaker and Reese (1932) argue further that "reducing large amounts of texts to quantitative data does not provide a complete picture of meaning and contextual codes as media texts may contain many other forms of emphasis besides sheer repetition" (1996: 32). The study will therefore use a qualitative methodological approach, which is suitable for studying media texts as representations and not as an empirical reflection of reality. However, the study will use quantitative content analysis as a stepping to make qualitative judgements about media texts. As Wimmer and Dominick (1994) have pointed out, "quantification is very important in content analysis as it provides the statistical tools that are used in analysis and interpretation" (1994:164).

3.1 Overview of content analysis

As Deacon et al. (1996) postulate, quantitative methods enumerate research data and qualitative approaches explain it thereby indicating that "a combination of the two methods always strengthens a study's findings" (1999:30). Newbold et al. (1998) also point out that quantitative and qualitative content analyses are complimentary fields and are part of "a continuum of analysing media texts to try and determine their likely meanings to, and impact on audiences" (1998:156). Newbold et al (1998) expand on the combination of these methodologies within content analysis as follows:

> Content analyses count occurrences of specified dimensions *and* they analyse the *relationships* between these dimensions. Although content analysis initially fragments texts down into constituent parts which can be counted, it-reassemblies these constituent parts at the analysis and interpretation stage to examine which

> ones co-occur in which contexts, for what purposes, and with what implications (1998:156).

Wright (1986) agrees that content analysis may involve both quantitative and qualitative approaches:

> Content analysis may involve quantitative or qualitative analysis, or both. Technical objectivity requires that the categories of classification and analysis be clearly and operationally defined so that other researchers can follow them reliably. For example, analysis of the social class of television characters requires clear specification of the criteria by which class is identified and classified, so that independent coders are likely to agree on how to classify a character. It is important to remember however, that content analysis itself provides no direct data about the nature of the communicator, audience or effects. Therefore great caution must be exercised whenever this technique is used for any purpose other than classification, description and analysis of the manifest content of media representation. (1986:125)

McNamara (2006) also agrees that after analysing research material quantitatively, "qualitative content analysis of media texts is necessary to understand their deeper or latent meanings and likely interpretations by audiences; surely this should be the ultimate goal of analysing the media" (2006:54). In view of the foregoing arguments, a combination of the two methods should to be the ideal approach for this study. Newbold at al (1998) also agree that "the use of qualitative content analysis is inherent in studies of media organisations, media professionals, sources of information and, generally, the production of news and other media content" (1998:94).

3.2 Using qualitative analysis

Introduction

As already indicated above, this study conceives of media texts or content as representations and not as an empirical reflection of reality. Like Steinberg (1994), this study will also conceive of media representations "as systems of meaning" (1994:48). The study will therefore use discourse and semiotic analyses as qualitative methodological approaches to determine patterns of representation of women in television news. Bertrand and Hughes (2005) postulate that meaning always presents two interconnected levels of interpretation: 'denotation' and 'connotation'. Watson and Hill (2000) explain that denotation refers to the literal or surface meaning of media texts; whereas connotation looks beyond the literal or surface meaning of media texts to their deeper or hidden meaning.

3.2.1 Discourse analysis

Van Dijk (1997) postulates that although discourse analysis also uses statistical information to analyse media texts like quantitative analysis, it differs from the latter in that it "leans heavily on the quality of the information presented for analysis" (1997:29). Van Dijk (1997) emphasises that discourse analysis looks at both the manner in which information is presented *and* what implication that has for the subject concerned; "in other words, discourse analysis looks at how media texts construct their subject" (1997:30). Van Dijk (1997) postulates further that if for example, women are often represented as victims of violence in television news, this could be "interpreted as a negative representation of women, which undermines their self-confidence; and reinforces social attitudes about women as passive and helpless" (1997:30). Steinberg (1994) explains that a critical mode of discourse is that of language. However Foucault (1980) postulates that discourse is not merely language as it "also refers to a phenomenon that is broader than language" (1980:114).

Foucault (1980) explains that human beings understand themselves through history rather through semiotic approaches; with power forming a critical part of that understanding. Foucault (1980) argues further that one's point of reference should not be to the great model of language – langue - and signs but to that of war and battle. He explains that this is because history which bears and determines reality has the form of war rather than that of language: relations of power and not relations of meaning (1980: 114). On the other hand Hall (1997) explains analyses Foucault's (1980) idea of discourse in the following way:

> By 'discourse' Foucault (1980) means a group of statements which provide a language for talking about; a way of representing the knowledge about; a particular topic at a particular historical moment. Discourse is about the production of knowledge through language (1997: 44).

Hall (1980) argues further that "the production of knowledge is always crossed with questions of power and the body; and this greatly expands the scope of what is involved in representations" (1980: 51). Jalbert (1983) agrees that the "use of certain language and visual images; ultimately, representations over others; points to power relations that exist within the media" (1983:103). Gitlin (1980) corroborates this argument and postulates that "the production of news is a system of power" (1980:251). Kareithi (2001) argues that problems with representations "commonly exist where there are large power inequalities, thereby creating and placing certain frames of reality against a subordinate group" (2001:34).

3.2.2 Semiotic analysis

Cowie (1978) postulates that semiotic analysis refers to the study of media texts as "symbols and signs and how meaning is attached to them" (1978:60). This study also

adopts Cowie (1978)'s definition of the semiotic meaning attached to women in media texts as that of subjects constructed to "carry a culturally and ideological loaded sign – that of being a 'non-man' – the opposite of being masculine with women's clothing, appearances and behaviours being signs of their non-maleness" (1978:60). Cowie (1978) argues further that semiotic analysis suggests that "before women are viewed as politicians or experts in different fields, they are viewed first and foremost as women" (1978:60). Bignell (2002) postulates that semiotic analysis is concerned with the deeper meaning of media texts because it helps in "identifying certain conventions and depictions that may be found in media texts which is an essential feature of qualitative analysis" (2002:8). Bignell (2002) explains further that structural relationship within media texts "inform the underlying implications of the latent content found within a media text, which semiotic analysis focuses on deconstructing" (2002:8). Gunter (2000) also agrees that semiotic analysis is not concerned with manifest or surface content but is concerned with "structural relationships of representations in texts" (2000:83).

This study therefore focuses on semiotic categories of denotation and connotation and their role within "greater systems of meaning and representations within society" (Chandler 2007:46). Like Tuchman (2002) this study will consider media texts as artefacts that are "replete with symbols of the society which shapes them and which they in turn reshape and reassert" (2002:81) while at the same time adopting van Dijk (1998)'s approach that media symbols "form part of the ideological structure of society" (1998:1).

Chapter Four

Findings

Introduction

The study found two major discourses and a recurrent pattern in the way that the SABC represented women over the research period through language and television images. Images and portrayals of women as victims and objects of sexual desire, domesticity and passivity were major discourses throughout the research period. At the same time, marginalizing women voices in news was a major pattern of representation. The study also found that women were portrayed as care givers, and as active people with the agency to tackle issues adversely affecting their lives.

4.1 Occurrence of women central images

The findings show that there were comparatively fewer images of women as sources and people portrayed in dominant news roles on each successive Women's Day. Visuals of the main speakers at Women's Day rallies were dominated by close-up images of male government officials. The finding show that images of women tended to focus on parts of their bodies, ages, clothing, passivity and helplessness. However the findings also show that there was a surge in the occurrence of women central images on Women's Day 2000 which coincided with the unveiling of the *Imbokodo Monument* – a phrase that literally means "The Rock" and symbolises the historic march by thousands of South African women of all races against oppressive pass laws on 9th August 1956; after which Women's Day is named. The study found that a marked dip in the occurrence of women central images on Women's Day 1999 coincided with a change in government from President Nelson Mandela's government to President Thabo Mbeki's government when national attention was focussed on the general elections; at the same time that the country was still coming to terms with the departure of an iconic leader from the national stage.

Table 1 – Occurrence of women central images

Date	Image Count	% of WCI
9th August 1999	23	1
9th August 2000	94	70
9th August 2001	27	3
9th August 2002	25	2
9th August 2003	44	7
9th August 2004	78	11
9th August 2005	39	1
Total	**330**	**100%**

Legend

WCI = Women central images

4.2 Patterns of representation

The tables, images and figures presented below reveal the patterns of representation of women on SABC News over the research period. These presentations reveal that most of the television images tended to portray women as objects of desire, victims or passive subjects in news. These results also that women are represented as people with the agency to confront challenges in their lives only in a limited number of case.

Table 2 – Distribution of patterns of portrayal

Pattern	%
Objects of desire	45
Victims	35
Passive subjects	15
Active agents	5
Total	**100%**

The table above reveals that television news tended to portray women as either objects of visual desire, victims of a variety of unfortunate circumstances or passive crowds at Women's Day rallies. The research data also reveals that only in a limited number of cases are women portrayed positively as people with the agency and energy to solve difficulties adversely affecting their lives.

4.3 Sex-role portrayals

Image 1 - Rite of passage: Young Khoisan bride takes centre stage at her traditional wedding ceremony on the banks of Gamtoos River, Eastern Cape**.** Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2002



The image above shows elderly Khoisan women and a young bride celebrating a traditional wedding on Women's Day. The elderly women are covered from head to toe in heavy but colourful traditional head dresses and tunics. The beadwork hanging from their necks denote their married statuses. In contrast, the exuberant young bride is scantily clad and bare breasted to connote desirability, youthfulness and purity – essential attributes connoting fecundity. The two sticks in the bride's hands connote her readiness to protect her children and fend off other maidens who might be eyeing her groom with lust. By depicting the women in high spirits and 'appropriate' attire, the SABC is representing the institution of marriage as the ultimate goal that every woman should strive for. Such portrayal of women in limited and restrictive roles relegates issues adversely affecting women to the distant background.

The study found that such obsession with the female body - which occurred in 45% of the visuals accompanying television news – relegated issues adversely affecting women's lives to the background.

Image 2 - Traditional dress code: Xhosa women in formal traditional clothing pose for SABC television cameras before making their way to a Women's Day rally at Thembalethu Community Hall in George, Western Cape. Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000



The way in which Xhosa women in the image above wear their clothes and accessories signify that they are married. It is a very strict dress code that requires all married Xhosa to cover their heads with turbans; and wrap blankets dyed with red ochre around their shoulders or over their busts as a sign of respect for their husbands and men in general. The houses in the background associate women with the home and the domestic sphere. In general, the image portrays women in ways that connote modesty, self-respect and a deep reverence for the motherhood. By depicting women in this way, the SABC is reinforcing patriarchy and gender inequality.

Image 3 – A quiet moment among friends: The image below shows colourfully attired Xhosa women listening attentively to a speaker at a Women's Day rally at Thembalethu Hall in George, Western Cape. The image also shows that the mandatory turban or head dress for married Xhosa women can now be worn in riot of rich colours – as opposed to the traditional monolithic red – and may be twisted into a variety of attractive shapes depending on the area of origin of the wearer. A turban twisted well over the eyes – third woman from left – usually indicates that the wearer has recently given birth to a child and is currently observing the traditional ritual of "respect" for her husband and in-laws. By portraying them in this way, the SABC is reinforcing notions of traditional sex roles for women without highlighting the challenges that are adversely affecting their lives nor suggesting any strategies for solving them. The image is taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000. However the attire is also highly functional and serves to protect the

wearer from the harsh climatic elements in the region. Nowadays this traditional clothing for Xhosa women is also largely voluntary and symbolises ethnic unity, and the deep respect and pride that the women have for their culture.



Image 4 – Tradition and activism: a Venda woman – main picture in the image below – sings and dances as she celebrates Women's Day 2004 at Princess Magogo Stadium outside Durban. The multi-coloured head ring and traditional shawl wrapped around her body announces her status as a married woman; and connotes pride and reverence for her culture and the institution of marriage. Geographically, she is far away from home in the extreme north of the country and in all probability finds herself in Durban – in the extreme south of the extreme south of the country – by virtue of marriage to a local man. By portraying women in this way, the SABC is confirming that women do appreciate government efforts to improve their lives, however modest these efforts might be.





Image 5 – Taking a call: a beautiful woman smiles broadly as she takes a call on her cellular phone during a break at a Women's Day seminar in Four Ways, Johannesburg. Another woman – standing in the background to the left of the image - is also using the break to get onto her cellular phone. Wireless technology like cellular telephony has empowered both urban and rural women by helping developing countries like South Africa leap-frog telecommunications infrastructure challenges. Using cellular phones, the women in this image can communicate news of Women's Day proceedings to other women who are unable to attend faster and cheaper than radio or television news. They can also keep in touch with their friends and families. Regardless of social class, many women have embraced cellular phone technology. By depicting women in this way, the SABC is empowering women by encouraging them to aspire to a more modern way of life. Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000.



Image 6 – Celebrating the big day: Xhosa women sing and dance as they celebrate Women's Day. The women are part of a crowd of more 300 others that had gathered in

the Thembalethu Hall in George in the Western Cape to mark Women's Day 2000. The study found that the portrayal of women in such a festive mood tended to mask difficult problems facing them in the region including inequality in the home, at work and in politics. Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000

4.4 Representation of women as victims

The study found women as victims discourse to be a recurring theme in the television images and language used by government officials to represent their situation on SABC News on Women's Day. The words accompanying the television images show that more than 60 % of women living in rural South Africa and the inner cities of major urban areas are victims of natural calamities, extreme poverty or dread diseases like HIV and AIDS. The figure above includes a large proportion of women who are living as unemployed people in villages or working for meagre wages on farms but are facing uncertain futures including evictions when they were either too old or too sick to be of any commercial use to farm owners. The words in the research material paint a picture of basic health facilities that are practically non existent for rural women; and that almost all of them – except for the very old, young or sick - have to walk long distances to fetch wood from rapidly receding forests and water from rivers on a daily basis. In addition, the words accompanying the television images also claimed that many rural women did not even know that it was Women's Day and that their immediate concern was how to feed hungry children. Significantly, the data also imply that it would not be possible for South Africa to achieve her full economic potential while women – who constitute the majority of the country's population – continued to be marginalized on the peripheries of developmental programmes. United Nations Economic Development figures cited by the journalists covering the stories on Women's Day show that women make up 70% of the world's poor and two thirds of its illiterate population.



Image 7 - Clearing the rubble: The image above shows Pedi women using rudimentary tools to clear rubble from a low level bridge in Limpopo Province. The text of the image indicates that the bridge had been destroyed by heavy rains about five months before

Women's Day and has been laying unusable ever since. However, despite the fact that the women in the picture are apparent victims of a natural calamity and are using rudimentary tools to rebuild the bridge, the image can still be interpreted as a positive representation of women as it tends to portray them as people with the agency and energy to tackle challenges in their lives – Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000.



Image 8: Washing the dishes: The image above shows a woman washing cooking utensils in a plastic basin in Elim village, Limpopo province. The rustic wooden bench that the woman in the image is using as a wash stand is a highly prized asset in rural South Africa. The words accompanying the image show that the woman is an advanced state of pregnancy. The words also indicate that the pregnant woman has the added responsibility of caring for the school going age child standing behind her in the picture because she cannot afford the school fees. The modest clothes that the woman and the child are wearing; the makeshift domestic utilities; and the rustic surrounding tend to connote a life of extreme poverty. By portraying women way in this way, the SABC tends to project them as victims of extreme poverty while at the same time reinforcing their sex roles as mothers, caregivers and wives. The pregnancy and the young child also tend to connote poor family planning or the woman's lack of control over her reproductive life – Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000



Image 9: Tribal markings: The image above shows a Zulu woman talking to SABC News in front of her rustic dwellings in uMsinga, KwaZulu Natal Midlands. According to Zulu tradition, the covered head signifies that she is a mother and a married woman. The scars on her face – cut at birth by family elders – are marks of tribal identity that are carried with pride and are also believed by the Zulu people to provide magical protection against misfortune. Although both the head cloth and facial markings voluntary accessories, the woman would lose her social standing and dignity in the eyes of her community without them. The rustic surroundings in the image tend to connote a life of extreme hardship. By portraying women in this way, the SABC tends to reinforce their subordinate positions in society and to project them as powerless victims of difficult circumstances.

4.5.1 Women as victims of HIV/AIDS

The research material used in this study shows that thousands of South African women are dying of HIV/AIDS related diseases because of their inability to negotiate safe sex with their partners and lack of access to anti-retroviral drugs used to treat the pandemic. The findings indicate that a problem related to women's lack of access to anti-retroviral drugs is the ballooning number of AIDS orphans and child headed households. The research material indicate that the department of health's hitherto unorthodox approach to the HIV and AIDS pandemic is largely for the deterioration of the health crisis triggered by the disease in the country. In addition, the findings suggest that South Africa's fight against HIV and AIDS is being rendered ineffective by the millions of rands and massive intellectual resources that are being wasted following dead cure ends or strategies. Wastages of resources include money spent on theatrical productions like *Sarafina Two* that are ostensibly aimed at raising AIDS awareness and on medically untested and unsafe AIDS drugs like Virodene, an industrial solvent.



Image 10: Dreadful skin disease: The image above shows a Cape Coloured woman suffering from a dreadful skin disease. According to the words accompanying the SABC News video clip from which this image was captured, the skin disease is a result of HIV infection. The image is arguably negative and tends to portray women in a poor light as it suggests that the disease is only ravaging women and sparing men – Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000.

4.5.3 Women as victims of violence

The research footage is replete with scenes of brutal assaults against women and children in South Africa and across the country's northern border in Zimbabwe. The narration of the research footage indicates that violence, rape and domestic abuse are some of the horrors facing women around South Africa and in neighbouring countries on a daily basis. One particularly gruesome footage shows five people, including two women and two young girls being gunned down in cold blood in Ulundi in northern KwaZulu Natal on Women's Day. The narration argues that such violence against women negatively affects their mental health and violates their human dignity. The findings also indicate that many witnesses to violence against women are not willing to come forward and testify before the authorities. The narration indicates that such unwillingness to testify is problematic because until people living in houses and areas wrecked by domestic conflict come out and report it to the authorities, it is often difficult for the latter to be aware of it.

The findings indicate that a third of women killed in South Africa are either killed by their spouses or by their partners. The findings indicate further that unless laws designed to protect women against domestic violence are backed up by robust enforcement mechanisms, they will remained ineffective. The narration indicates that the government of South Africa is considering taking tougher action against perpetrators of violence against women; including imposing longer prison sentences, stricter bail conditions and holding a national referendum on the possibility of reintroducing the death penalty. The findings also indicate that many women become victims of domestic abuse because they are financially dependent on the men in their lives.

Recordings made available to SABC News on Women's Day, courtesy of the Zimbabwe Advocacy Campaign recount personal testimonies of rape and abuse in the hope that such stories will touch the hearts and minds of South Africans. The narration indicates that many women in the Zimbabwean Advocacy Campaign footage are unwilling to show their faces for fear of further victimisation. The findings indicate further that a significant number of perpetrators of violence against women in that country are in fact members of the Zimbabwean state structures including those from the army, the police and members of the dreaded Central Intelligence Organisation.

4.5.3 Gender victimisation in the workplace

The research footage also represents women as victims of gender discrimination in the workplace. The footage indicates that women are still earning less than men despite the promulgation of progressive employment equity laws by the government of South Africa. The data indicates that on average, women in South Africa earn as low as 76% of what men earn at the end of each month. The data cites figures published by Statistics South Africa – the national statistical agency – showing that the majority of people benefiting from the South African government's Black Economic Empowerment programmes are men; despite the fact that women comprise the majority of the country's population 52% of the South African population, The footage also indicates that women did not fare any better in the corporate world either, where they are up against an artificial restriction when they try to move up the employment ranks. The footage indicates that it is because of this artificial barrier, widely referred to as a 'glass ceiling', that women executives in South Africa only comprise about 12, 5% of top company management personnel. The findings indicate that even in the corporate space still earn less than men on average. In general, the footage indicates out of South Africa's 13 million employed people – according to figures made available by Statistics South Africa to SABC News on Women's Day 2002 – only 5 million of them are women. Furthermore, the data indicates that globally, only 36 of the top 500 chief executive officers featured in America's Fortune Magazine in 2001 are women. However an expert specialising on workplace issues interviewed by the SABC in the footage posits that although gender discrimination is arguably less severe than racial exclusion when looked at on a global scale, South Africa is in a unique position because she has a corporate culture that discriminates on both gender and racial grounds. The findings indicate that because of unique situation, the majority of management personnel in the workplace in South Africa are still comprised of white men.

4.6 Women as proactive agents

Contrary to extensive claims in the literature on representation of women in the media, the findings of the study indicate that an increasing number of women do in fact have the agency to carve out successful careers for themselves. An analysis of research footage covering different situations including one on the life of women soldiers in the South African National Defence Force confirms this tendency. In the defence force footage, women are portrayed as continuing to distinguish themselves in the face of persistent sexism and the tendency by their male superiors to overlook their courageous behaviour.
These footages suggest that such spirited women are in control of their lives and not dependent on their male partners or relatives. The words accompanying the footages indicate that some of these women own multi-million rand businesses that they have independently started from scratch. The words accompanying the research footage also reveal that these proactive women often use Women's Day meetings to encourage disadvantaged girls never to give up hope and to work hard for a successful future.



Image 11 – All ears: Urban based women listen attentively as a keynote speaker – out of the picture – delivers a Women's Day speech and a message of solidarity at a conference centre in Four Ways, Johannesburg. The image can be interpreted as a positive portrayal of women by the SABC as it tends to suggest that they are people independently grappling with issues affecting their lives – Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2000.



Image 12 – Executive sedan: A Durban based businesswoman uses a modern electronic device to lock-up her luxury German sedan car. According to the audio text accompanying the image, the women is the sole owner of a thriving multi-million rand business and her car costs more than the price of an average person's home. The image is a positive portrayal of women as people who are also capable of achieving lofty goals in life just like their male counterparts – Taken from SABC News, Women's Day 2004.

4.7 Marginalisation of women's voices

Introduction

The study indicates that women voices are marginalised in news discourse when they are represented as sources; in their function as sources; as protagonists; in their news roles; as journalists; in major news topics and in terms of issues of concern to them. The findings reveal that even during Women's Month, the SABC had not successfully overcome a top-heavy or hierarchical approach to sourcing news. The findings indicate that in such a hierarchical approach; news ends up being heavily dominated by male sources that are invariably represented as voices of authority. In general, the findings indicate that except in socially significant issues like health and education, news producers tend to seek the views of those who make policy more than the views of those who are affected by it.

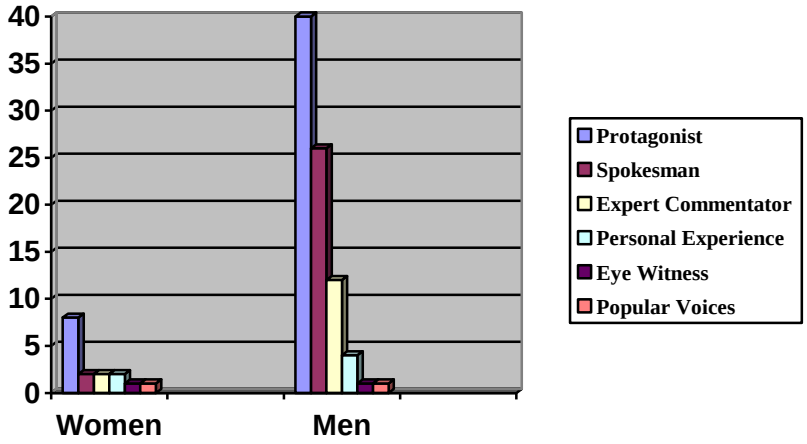
4.7.1 Marginalisation of female sources

The study divided 64 bulletin items into different news topics and counted the use of female sources in each of those topics. The findings of the study indicate although women hold high public office in South African society as cabinet ministers; parliamentarians; provincial premiers; executive mayors; sports administrators; business people; academics; scientists; lawyers and doctors; they are seldom represented in news as authoritative sources. Instead the findings reveal that whenever they are used as sources of news, women are represented as disempowered private people affected by politics; crime; poverty, illiteracy, disease; family conflicts and war. The findings indicate that compared to female sources, news places male sources in positions of authority. The findings reveal a thin distribution of female sources in so-called 'hard news' compared to so-called 'soft news'. As Figure 2 below shows, women's voices are marginalised as sources in main news topics like politics, economics, labour, sport and news about African in the Great Lakes region. The findings indicate that female sources are mainly used in socially significant news topics like health, education, community issues, arts and culture and as people affected by natural disasters and food insecurity. The findings also reveal that even in news topics like health and education, female sources are more likely to be represented as people affected by government policies on health and education rather than policy makers in those areas.

4.7.2 Marginalising functions of female sources

The findings reveal that the marginalisation of female sources is deepened further by the minor functions that they are allowed to play compared to male sources. In this regard the findings reveal that expert media commentators and spokesmen – whom the present study conceives as those who provide context and analysis to stories and those who speak with authority on behalf of organizations, respectively – are invariably men. The findings indicate that female sources of news only function on a more equitable level with those of their male counterparts in the so-called ordinary people's voice categories of anecdote or personal experience; eye witness and popular voice or experience. The foregoing nuances are set out in the figure below.

Figure 3: Function of sources



The figure above shows the different functions of female and male sources in television news. The figure reveals that men are much more preferred as sources of news compared to women by media producers.

4.7.4 Marginalising women in news roles

The study indicates that women are significantly under-represented in the main protagonist roles over the research period. The study conceives of protagonist role as the news function played by a central character in a news story. The main news roles surveyed in the present study include head of state and/or government; cabinet ministers; leaders of political parties; people in positions of authority; professionals in different areas of specialization; community leaders; criminals, terrorists; victims; mother; wife;

father; husband and athletes. The distribution of these news roles by gender are illustrated in the following diagram:

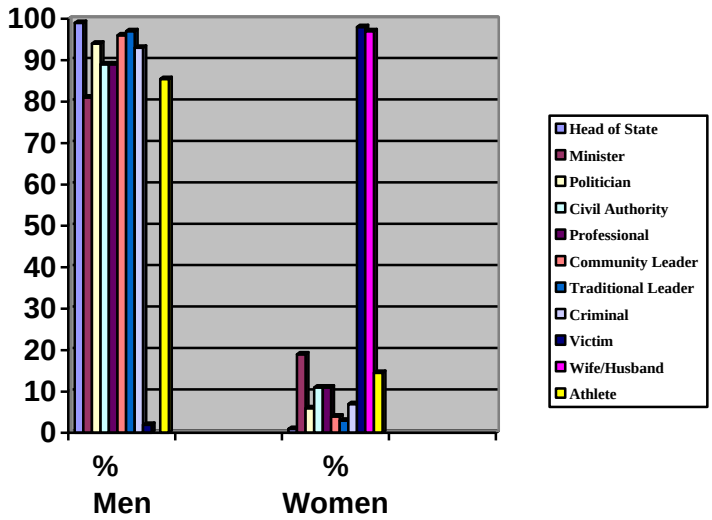
4.7.3 Marginalisation of female protagonists

The study conceives of protagonists as the men and women who are the central characters in a news story. The findings indicate that male protagonists dominate content in major news topics as only 92 of the 368 people surveyed are women. The foregoing gender imbalance is shown in the table below:

Table 2: Distribution of protagonists by gender

Topic	% of female protagonists	% of male protagonists
Politics	14	86
Labour	2	88
Africa	9,8	90,2
Traditional Affairs	-	100
Economics	12,5	87,5
International News	2,7	97,3
Crime	3,2	96,8
Health	55	45
Education	80	20
Sport	8,6	91,4

Figure 4: Marginalising women in news roles



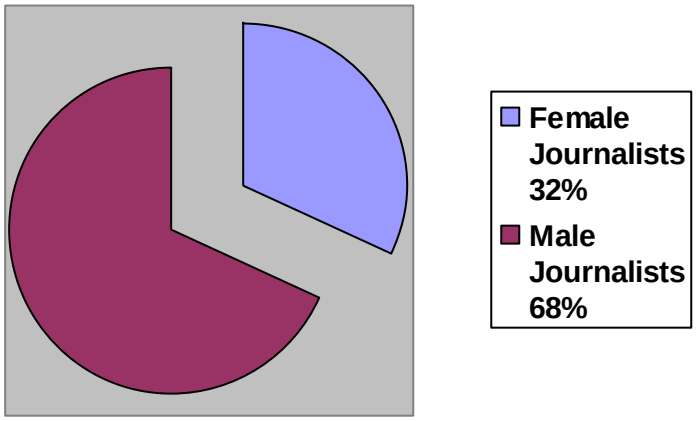
The figure above reveals how women are marginalised and given comparatively less important roles in television news. The figure reveals that men dominate in public sphere

roles such as head of state, government ministers, politician and civil authority. This is despite the fact that many women hold high public offices in South Africa. The figure shows that women only dominate in private sphere roles such as housewife which also stress their personal relationship with men.

4.7.5 Marginalisation of female journalists

The study found that the number of female journalists working on bulletin items over the research period was markedly low compared to that of male journalists. The study conceives journalists as people who packaged bulletin items by interviewing sources, writing the scripts and reporting them on air. The findings indicate that out of a total of 174 journalists surveyed; only 55 are women. The study found bias towards reporters particularly poignant on Women's Day itself when as many nine male journalists compared to only four female journalists reported on news stories; and at the end of Gender Week when all journalists who reported on bulletins items were men. The foregoing gender imbalance is shown in the pie chart below.

Figure 5: Gender gap in newsrooms



The figure above reveals how female journalists are significantly outnumbered by their male counterparts in newsrooms. Although it has not been conclusively proven, prominent media theorists like van Zoonen (1998) believe that increasing the number of female journalists in newsrooms will improve the treatment or portrayal of women by the news media. What cannot be faulted however is that employing more female journalists will enhance the ideals of employment equity enshrined in South Africa's labour laws.

4.7.6 Marginalising women in news topics

The table below reveal that female news sources are marginalised in the main or hard news categories of politics, economics, labour and sport. The table shows that women are mainly used in the 'care categories of health, education and community news. Further, the data gathered in the research also reveal that female sources dominate natural disaster news as people affected by these calamities rather as the main sources of information.

Table 3 – Gender of news sources

News Topic	% of female sources	% of male sources
Politics	19	81
Economics	18	82
Sport	15	85
Health	51	49
Labour	18	82

Table 4: Gender in news topics

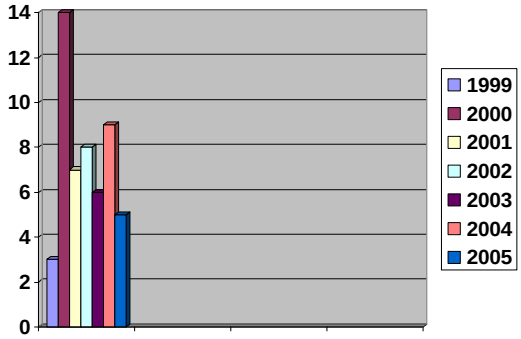
News Topic	% of female journalists	% of male journalists
Politics	23	77
Labour	30	70
Crime	40	60
Violence	40	60
African News	10	80
War	5	95
International News	25	75

As the figure above shows, female journalists were consistently under-represented in the so-called 'hard' or important news categories including politics, labour, war and international news on Women's Day itself and during gender month. The gender imbalance suggests that hard news tend to be biased towards the male perspective. The imbalance also points to a suppression of female voices in news.

4.8 Marginalisation of women issues

The study found that women issues are under-represented in SABC television news as only 44% of the items broadcast over the research period are women central items. The study conceives of women central items as those issues that either have significant impact on their lives are of sufficient concern to them. These issues include development; law; beauty culture; art and culture, community issues; traditional affairs violence against women; health and reproduction and women's empowerment. The findings indicate that the marginalisation of women's issues during gender month was unfortunate as the national broadcaster could have used the opportunity to foreground women central issues.

Figure 6: Daily occurrence of women issues (%)



The figure above shows how issues of concern to women form only a minuscule part of the daily television news bulletin. The figure reveals that at no point during the research period did the coverage of issues of concern to women rise above the 20% mark. The highest surge was recorded on Women's Day 2000.

Chapter Five

Analysis

Introduction

The study set out with the aim of using quantitative content analysis as a stepping stone to make qualitative judgements about whether the main patterns of representations of women in the news media – particularly in 'stereotypical' roles as alleged in the literature – tend to reflect and reinforce dominant societal values.
As recommended by van Dijk (1997) the study uses discourse analysis and cultural semiotics to make judgements about "why women are under-represented or represented in stereotypical ways when they are cited as sources or people in the news – as also shown in the quantitative findings section above" (1997:30). Gallagher (1981) also agrees that such theoretical approaches should be used to test allegations that patterns of women's representations in the news media like stereotypes are problematic as a result of conventions of news gathering and framing; the under-representation of female reporters or the sexism of male media practitioners in newsrooms. However as Burgelin (1969) argues, the limitations inherent in quantitative content analysis as a method are often compounded by a frequent lack of a thorough theoretical discussion of what is meant by the term 'stereotype'– often it is just labelled a "dirty word" (1969:313) – and how the use of stereotypes in the news media are related to ideology (Hall 1982:56).

The qualitative approach also suffers from its own limitations, its main problem being that is that it assumes a pre-social, unified and identifiable category called 'woman' and denies the existence of women's power and agency as members of the news media audience (Kramarae and Spender 2000:1192). In addition, if there is no perfect category that represent the interest of all women as Nead (1992) has pointed out, then images of women in the news media cannot not be "considered in absolute terms but should be considered in relation to an exploration of women's social, diverse, cultural and economic identities" (1992:72).

5.1 Stereotypical representation of women

As the quantitative findings section above show, women are mainly represented in stereotypical roles as mothers, housewives, and passive people in the news or as victims of rural poverty, crime, domestic abuse or natural disasters. There are various reasons why women are portrayed in limited and particular ways by the news media. First, within the context of the study it is plausible for the SABC to portray women as mothers and housewives because the South African society is still predominantly a patriarchal one. Such media practice is explained by Tuchman (1994) using the "reflection of social

reality" hypothesis which contends that the news media tends to reflect and reinforce dominant social assumptions. "Most media portray women – if at all – in the traditional roles of homemaker, mother – or if they are in paid workforce – as clerical workers and other 'pink-collar' jobs" (1978a:150). Such an explanation is also supported by Acosta-Alzuru (1998) who points out that stereotypical representations of women in the news media are influenced by traditional visions of women's roles in society as mothers, housewives and caregivers: "the viewer sees suffering mothers and beautiful young girls; great emphasis is placed on the women's physical appearances, their clothes fancy hairstyles" (1998:139). In addition, it can also be argued that a traditional vision of women's role in society is itself driven by the philosophy of *marianismo* which is "the belief that women have the spiritual strength and capacity for self-sacrifice that makes them good mothers and housewives" (Kramarae and Spender 2000:1192).

These representation of women in limited roles and particular patterns – except for biologically determined roles such as child bearing - can also be put down to the social division of labour according to which certain tasks such as household chores and caring for the family including caring for the husband and the children are assigned to women. Tuchman (1978a) says such gendered division of labour ultimately pigeon-holes women into socially approved roles that are represented by the news media as "sex appropriate appearances, interests, skills, behaviours and self-perceptions for women" (1978a:153). As reflections of dominant values and gender relationships in South African society, these portrayals of women by the SABC accentuate an important dimension about women's lives. This dimension refers to the lack of progress in the struggle for gender equality in the country despite the promulgation of progressive gender legislation and the accompanying rhetoric by senior government officials. Such stereotypical representation of women in television news can also be seen as a reflection of low levels of gender aware reporting; that in turn can be put down to both a lack of training in gender issues and the absence or marginalisation of female journalists.

However it is in terms of their function in news that the concepts of "sex or traditional roles" and "stereotype" are most objectionable. The concept of "sex roles" is a problematic social construct that tends to hide and justify issues of power and inequality between men and women in society. Any government strategy that does not confront notions of appropriate sex roles cannot be reasonably expected to make progress toward achieving gender equality. As Lopata and Thorne (1978) have shown, notions of sex roles tend to "focus attention more on individuals than on social strata, more on socialisation than on social structure, and has therefore deflected attention away from historic, economic and political questions" (1978:719). At the same time, stereotypes are also objectionable and false representations of women that serve to discriminate against them by distorting their lived experience in a variety of ways.

As Perkins (1979) explains, stereotypes function by inverting cause and effect. For example, the complex and deeply entrenched social and economic factors that keep women away from positions of authority and dependent on men in patriarchal societies like South Africa; are represented in SABC stereotypes as a logical and innate female function and characteristic: women exist to look after their families; are passive, less

intelligent and weaker than men by *nature.* In this way stereotypes serve to "explain and justify obvious inequalities in a society whose official ideology is gender equality" (King 1973:12). Using sex role stereotypes, the demands placed on woman's job as a mother and housewife to develop a variety of skills – for example to be able to change from housework to wife, and to child care very rapidly – is conveniently overlooked by the news media. What the sex role stereotype does is to pervert social reality by first identifying the multi-dimensional nature of a women's job, place a negative evaluation on it, and then represent it as innate female characteristic.

Stereotypes are problematic in additional ways, few if any of them portray strong female characters in the public sphere or within the family environment. Instead stereotypes constructed within the family environment appear to be encouraging women to pursue domestic goals like marriage, child bearing, cooking, washing and baking. At the same time stereotypes appear not to be encouraging women to pursue progressive goals like education, training, business and similar pursuits traditionally tend to bring individuals into positions of power, authority and independence. Tuchman (1978a) also notes that stereotypes generally tend to portray women in terms of their relationship with men, "suggesting that women are in the end they are dependent and incapable of living their own lives without male guidance" (1978a:150). Such an approach does very little to encourage the engineering of society in which men and women are equally valued.

5.2 Marginalisation of women in news

Introduction

The study also found that women are significantly underrepresented as sources and people in news compared to men. As the findings chapter above shows, only 27% of the people cited as sources of news on Women's Day, the height of Women's Month were women. When women did appear, issues of concern to women were seriously marginalized. These findings concur with Rakow and Kranich's (1991) argument that research after research continues to document that women are seriously underrepresented in the news media as sources of news and as newsmakers and that that "the absence of women as newsmakers is related to their absence as sources of news" (1991:22)

5.2.1 Marginalisation of female sources

Media content is preponderantly people centred. A common journalistic premise is therefore that "media consumers can only understand abstract content by personalizing it" (Richards and King 2000:23); placing the question "who says?" at the centre of the news construction process. Only people in positions of authority or of high social standing are regarded as reliable sources of news by journalists. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) agree that most news comes from official sources and these are primarily

governmental channels. A critical consequence of the dominance of authoritative sources in media content is that news is often about what prominent individuals say about what happened rather than the event itself being the news. Chandler (1997) agrees that 'indeed, what such people say may constitute an event in itself because powerful make news" (1997:2). It is precisely for these reasons that the opinions of the dominant sections of society – mostly men - are given more weight and enjoy more coverage.

Perhaps more importantly, female sources are marginalised by the news media because news functions as a masculine narrative, circulating meanings that in general confirm and perpetuate existing gender relationships. Rakow and Kranich (1991) explain that in such a masculine narrative "female sources function not as speaking subjects but as signs" (1991:19). Hartley (1982) explains that a 'sign' is any entity that can create meaning. However Rakow and Kranich (1991) contend that "as a sign, female sources are unique in that they can only carry meaning but are not capable of creating it" (1991:23). The findings of the study confirm the proposition that women portrayed in television news are not sources of information as sources normally function; but are instead called in as evidence to support journalists' story lines; and senior government's officials arguments that women were victims of domestic violence, HIV/AIDS, poverty and underdevelopment. The SABC used women then, not as sources of information about their own lives but to illustrate the private consequences of government policies. In the process, the SABC effectively marginalised female voices.

Another factor undermining the representation of female sources – as the findings of the study show - is the tendency by many women interviewed by the SABC on Women's Day to blindly endorse the actions of government and the ruling African National Congress political party rather than criticizing areas of policy weakness on behalf of other women. Almost all of the laws promulgated by the post-apartheid South African government that directly affect women – including the Employment Equity, Equality, Domestic and Maintenances Acts; and the Preferential Procurement Act in the economic sector - with the aim of improving their lives, are highly progressive on paper.

However it is in failing to effectively implement these progressive laws that the government has missed out on a golden opportunity to improve the lives of South African women. At the same time it is also due to their failure to speak truth to power on these developments that women speakers contributed to the marginalisation of female voices on Women's Day. Rakow and Kranich (1991) explain that on many occasions, when women participate in public debates, they tend not to speak for other women but for organisation that more often than not do not act in the best interests of women. There is also a strong possibility that political organisation might use pliable women to sell their positions to other women or to neutralize the strengths of arguments that women might make against the lack of delivery on political promises. Such women are often seen as valuable instruments in maintaining the status quo for the organisations concerned and are usually rewarded with elevation to high public office within their structures.

The marginalisation of independent female sources means that most news stories broadcast on Women's Day lack a critical analysis of issues affecting women. Another

strategy equally debilitating to the cause of women – as the findings of the study show – is the tendency by the SABC to portray independent female sources as extremists or radical feminists. Women such Independent Democrats leader Patria de Lille are portrayed as unfairly critical of a government that is trying its best for women under very difficult circumstances. Rakow and Kranich (1991) explain that the objective of negative portrayals of independent female sources is to show the world that "real women" do not support feminism. In fact by portraying de Lille in such a negative light, an impression is also created in the minds of SABC audiences that she is just another opposition politician trying to score cheap political points against the ruling African National Congress rather than expressing legitimate concern for the plight of South African women.

However, a useful characteristic of authoritative sources for journalists is their accessibility. The findings of this study reinforce the proposition that female sources are less accessible and often do not have the resources to get their messages out compared to their male counterparts. An important consequence of such a situation as Caldoso-Coulthard (1999) postulates is that unequal access to the news media by men and women is evident in what is reported; who speaks on what; and as a result "the linguistic code imposes and reinforces the attitudes and values on what is represented" (1999:226). Shoemaker and Reese (1996) also agree that government and business sources are most accessible to journalists "often preparing events or information specifically for them" (1996: 12). As the findings of this study confirm, journalists do not recognise women as legitimate sources of news and expert opinion makers. The findings of the study also confirm that when female sources are quoted in news they are often represented as popular voices which Holland (1997) describes as "either anonymous examples of uninformed public opinion, housewives, consumer, neighbour or as mother, sister, wife of the man in the news; or as victims of crime, disaster or political policy" (1997:197). These findings mean that not only do women speak lesss than men in news but rather that they tend to speak as passive reactors to news events rather than as active participants in those news events .With such obvious disadvantages compared to men, women are virtually wiped-out as sources of news.

Another widespread tendency among journalists is to seek out people who share the same values as themselves; preferably those with a vested interest in publicly criticizing or affirming a particular news event or newsmaker. Sources who disagree with the story line the journalist is taking are expunged from the news bulletins. Journalists use this approach to justify their story lines and to represent them as objective reflections of social reality. More often than not the preferred sources are men. Manning (2001) explains that this gender imbalance in selecting sources is driven by the fact that "most journalists are men; and most politicians and/or leaders; and/or senior executives are also men a male-ordered cycle is repeated endlessly in this buddy-buddy world" (Manning 2001 in Byerly and Ross 2006: 47). Journalists' preferences for male sources means that women are hardly afforded the opportunities to tell their stories; and have to live with male versions of female realities. As Gans (1980) has shown, the journalistic predilection for using mostly official sources means the kind of news that audiences ultimately receive is the sanitised and official version of reality. More often than not, this sanitised and official version of reality is the male version of reality in television news.

Except when there was a surge in the coverage of women's issues like on Women's Day 2000 during the unveiling of the *Imbokodo Monument* – literally meaning 'the rock' and symbolizing South African women's resistance to gender oppression – the findings of the study confirm that news articles featuring contributions by female source tended to be significantly shorter than those featuring male sources. Zoch and VanSlyke Turk (1998) explain that since the length or duration of a news story is the cue that journalists give to the importance of a story - the longer it is, the more important it is - it appears then, that "men are quoted more frequently in the longer, more important stories and are trusted more than women to give the longer, more in-depth quote" (1998: 769). The findings of the study show that in these longer quotes, men are actually trusted by journalists to talk about women's lives.

It is also quite common for journalists to justify their exclusion of female sources by arguing that there are relatively few women in positions of authority in government and other civil society structures like labour unions or political parties to quote as sources. However this argument is fundamentally weak in various ways. First, there are an increasing number of high profile women in the public sphere that can be quoted in news as credible sources. Byerly and Ross (2006) point out that although it is becoming less true that there are few women in positions of authority, it is "nonetheless seen as a legitimate excuse for marginalizing women's voices" (2006: 47). Secondly, the argument implies that only people in positions of authority have a worthy story to tell even if the story is more often about themselves rather than the news event itself. Thirdly it can be argued that the dearth of female sources in news points to journalists' unwillingness to bring gender balance into their stories.

What is also inexcusable as the findings of the study show is the tendency by journalists, either because of laziness, tight deadlines or political affiliation, to repeatedly use the same male sources as expert commentators and analysts for each and every news event or subject. In fact the ways in which journalists gather news and selectively use sources and quotes from those sources in their stories, combine to produce a gendered version of social reality. The selection of sources needs to be supported by logic. A logical example would be sourcing mostly men as expert commentators on a topical news debate about nuclear war when there are relatively few nuclear scientists available. In contrast, it will be difficult to justify sourcing mostly male sources like Women's Day as the findings of the study have shown. Ross (1995a) contends that there is absolutely no reason why "similar numbers of men and women should not be asked to comment on the issue of the day" (1995a:78). There is also absolutely no logical reason why female voices should not dominate the sourcing of Women's Day news as the event is about recognising women's contributions to life and highlighting the challenges facing them.

5.2.2 Marginalisation of women's issues

The findings of the study confirm that the coverage issues of concern to women is significantly lower than that of 'hard news' topics like politics, economics and labour that are generally regarded by the news media as the province of men. This low coverage of

women central issues is a contradiction in terms. Women's Month is officially regarded by the South African government as a time of celebrating women's contribution to the progress of South African society and of highlighting challenges facing them. There is therefore a legitimate expectation that such official support of women's concerns at the level of government should be reflected by a surge in media coverage of women's issues. Theoretically, Women's Day is an event rather than a process and should therefore be considered a newsworthy occurrence. The magnitude of Women's Day, given by the fact that it is a national event affecting thousands of women across South Africa; means that it is an important news event that should merit substantial media coverage. The findings of the study negate such a logical outcome.

It can therefore be argued that while it is reasonable to consider Women's Day an event rather than a process, the *process orientation* of many issues of special concern to women - on Women's Day or any other day for that matter - results in them being neglected by the news media. Such an approach by the news media is in line with the generally accepted paradigm that "events, rather than processes make news" (Joseph and Sharma 2006: 64). At the core of the process characterization of issues special concern to women which often involves thousands of them, is the fact that most women's issues are not overly violent or dramatic. The multitudes of women affected by issues of poverty, disease and underdevelopment also tend not to belong to organised groups nor concentrated in accessible geographical areas.

A number of serious women's issues are not overly violent or dramatic, and although often involving large numbers, the affected persons are not necessarily part of a readily identifiable group or concentrated in a particular geographical area. However it is interesting to note that of those few women issues that manage to capture the media's attention, "violent crimes against women receive more coverage than less gruesome but no less debilitating forms of oppression" (Joseph and Sharma 2006:65). Such unfavourable treatment of women's issues by the news media seems to suggest that many aspects of women's oppression are so commonplace and widely accepted that they are not considered sufficiently extraordinary to merit coverage. Such negative treatment of women's issues by the news media also suggests that women are only sufficiently interesting to merit coverage when they are in extreme pain or can be portrayed as extremely vulnerable. Further, such negative treatment of women's issues is a reflection of the extent to which patriarchy is embedded in many societies including South Africa.

For a fuller understanding of the treatment of women's issues by the news media it is also important to have a fundamental appreciation of 'news frames' that journalists use to package their news stories. News frames are interpretive, value-laden structures that allow journalists to construct their news stories. Norris (1997a) postulates that news frames constitute highly orchestrated ways of "understanding social and gender relations and encourage ways of seeing and interpreting the world in a manner that preserves the male-dominated status quo" (Norris 1997a in Byerly and Ross 2006: 41). Consciously or otherwise, journalists help to preserve the patriarchal status quo by using news frames to represent issues of special to women in a way that both excludes and includes; and both emphasizes and plays down certain facts. Gitlin (1979) agrees that journalists and other

media professionals are not necessarily aware of using dominant gendered frames in news. However using news frames, media producers routinely organise verbal and visual discourse in a particular way. The findings of the study have confirmed that one of these ways is the framing of issues of special concern to women as of comparatively less importance.

Also, the news media's tendency to represent society as a system of two independent spheres; one public and the other private, does not assist in portraying women's issues in a more positive light. In this dichotomy, "issues of politics, economics, policy and authority are the quintessential elements of the public sphere – which is regarded as the province of men and generally excludes women – while issues of family, religion, sexuality, friendship, neighbourhood and nurturing are the quintessential elements of the private sphere which is mainly populated by women" (Jensen 1987:8). The news media tends to regards issues of the private sphere as of less importantly and consequently less newsworthy. As long as issues of special concern to women remain relegated to the private sphere, they will always enjoy less news media coverage compared to the so-called public sphere issues of politics, economics and policy.

The highly mediated nature of the news production process is another obstacle that works against the newsworthiness of women's issues. Some women issues might sift through the first stage of mediation which is the selection of a few occurrences for broadcasting from literally thousands of daily occurrences. However it is from the second stage of mediation that the process orientation of many women's issues works against their selection as news stories of the day. It is at this stage that media producers use techniques such as the 'inverted pyramid' to select only those issues that are sufficiently dramatic or violent to grab and hold the attention of audiences for broadcasting. As most issues of special concern to women are neither overly dramatic nor violent, they hardly see the light of the day. At the third and final stage of the mediation of the news production process, media producers tend to focus the attention of audiences on particular aspects of the media while ignoring others. As Baker (2001) has shown, in television news "the camera will invariably pan towards an important aspect or character" (2001: 73). As the findings of the study confirm, most issues of special concern to women are not considered by media producers as important and newsworthy and television cameras will hardly pan towards them.

It would also appear that the marginalisation of issues of special concern to women in news is historical; and goes back to the early studies of news production in the 1890s. Rabe (2004) argues that ever since the question *ecquid novi*? - what is news? – was asked, the male standard of what constitute news always dominated: "news in the 1890s was about the birth and death of princes, the death of famous men and the end of notorious men" (2004: 61).
But the media shapes society with every image, every sound and every word that it broadcasts or publishes. We therefore need to accept our responsibility as an institution that has the power only to change attitudes but actions as well. Therefore our news values need to recognise 'women's issues' as societal issues as well

5.2.3 Marginalisation of female protagonists

The findings of the study have confirmed that compared to men, women are underrepresented in news as protagonists or central actors. Even on Women's Day when there was a surge in the coverage of issues of concern to women, the majority of protagonists were invariably male. Just a little over 11% of the protagonists appearing in news were female, the rest were male. These few female protagonists were either government ministers or politicians singing praises of how much the government and the ruling African National Congress party had done to improve the lives of women. In addition, none of these female protagonists were critical of the government's failure to effectively administer progressive gender legislation.

The news media industry should shoulder the blame for the marginalisation of female protagonists for various reasons. Chief among these reasons is a general tendency among many media institutions – the SABC included - to disregard the need to include training in gender sensitive reporting; as an integral part of their news gathering strategies. As a direct result of this oversight, journalists do not actively seek out female protagonists for their news stories. This oversight also makes the news media a source of negative messages about the roles women in news. News construction techniques such as the 'inverted pyramid' which emphasise the overly aggressive and dramatic also means that female protagonists stand a less chance of appearing in news compared to their male counterparts.

Although in general the media tends to interview people in positions of power – where women are often underrepresented – it can be argued that is not enough to explain the marginalisation of female protagonists in television news. As Edstrom (2008) postulates that other power structures within a society; its social and cultural history; the media logic of the editorial rooms, the expectations of the audiences; are social forces that can "also contribute or prohibit women's participation in the media" (2008:1). What all this means, as the findings of the study show, is that there tends to be a strong correlation between gender inequality in society and the marginalisation of female protagonists in the news media.

However in the context of South Africa, the marginalisation of female newsmakers is a contradiction in terms since there are a growing number of high profile women in the public sphere since the democratisation of the country in April 1994. South Africa has got a high number of women parliamentarians, government ministers, academics, doctors and scientists, yet the study found the number of female protagonists to be disproportionately low compared to men.
Instead women generally fall into the category of "ordinary people" who appear infrequently in news and stand for a social aggregate; while well known male individuals are used to represent social groups and political groups (Sigal 1987:9). In sum, when the news media uses women as sources, it tends to use them as public sources affected by crime, natural disasters, government policy or harmful actions by people known to them especially people who are members of their own families. Put in a different way, the news media hardly allows female sources to play an interpretative role in news discourse.

5.3 Marginalisation of female journalists

The findings of the study also show that female journalists are marginalised in SABC newsrooms both in terms of permanent news personnel compliment and the number of journalists assigned to cover Women's Day stories. In general, the representation of female journalists in newsrooms and on specific news stories can be analysed in terms of gendered power relations in the newsrooms and how these relationships affect media content. For example the marginalisation of female journalists in news management structures; and lower head count - is widely accepted as a plausible explanation for the marginalisation of women's issues and negative portrayal of women in news discourse.

The representation of female journalists can also be analysed in terms of media ownership structures and the government's employment equity laws aimed at achieving gender parity and content diversity in news. As a publicly owned media institution, the SABC should have been at the forefront of promoting gender parity and media diversity. It was therefore shocking to find during the study that less than 24% of journalists working on Women Day stories were female. However the study was not able to conclusively prove that employing more female journalists would automatically lead to more coverage of women's issues and positive portrayal of women in news discourse.

5.4 Objectification of women in news

As the findings of the study also confirm, the SABC tends to ignore women's contributions to South African society and the challenges facing them. Instead the SABC tended to focus on their clothes, physical appearances and to represent them within the limiting discourses of domesticity, motherhood, passivity and victimhood. Such focus imply that women's physical appearances are more important than their skills when judging their worth and content of character. To suggest that women's physical appearances are their most important attributes is a distortion of social reality that serves to justify their oppression by patriarchal societies like South Africa. The discourse of domesticity suggests to women that their domain is the private sphere of the home. In this private sphere, marriage and motherhood are noble goals to which all women should aspire to. Ironically as mothers and housewives, women become dependent on their husbands for food, shelter and clothing. Tuchman (1978a) postulates that repeated portrayals of sex roles in the news media is an issue of great social, political and economic concern as it could "encourage the maintenance of their subordinate position in society" (1978a:153). Conversely portraying women within an aspirational discourse of professionalism or business would be empowering.

The news media's proclivity to objectify or *victimise* women tends to be largely driven by contestations of power between men and women in society. The women at the centre of Women's Day rallies tend to be activists who feel very strongly about the empowerment of other women. Such a political stance presents the news media with a problem. As women activists they pose a threat to traditional masculine authority. These strong women tend to defy easy categorisation. In their desperation, the news media tries to

contain this threat to traditional masculine authority by attacking these women's physical appearances and ignoring their achievements. Duarte (1998) points out that the news tends to judge women by their looks and their morals, rather than by their intellect: "I have yet see a news story which describes a man's appearance in derogatory terms. It is what the man says that is important, not the colour of his teeth or the thrust of his chest" (Sunday Times 28/03/98:18). Such an approach implicates the news media in the continued suppression of women in patriarchal societies and suggests that it prefers women who speak softly, braid their hair and wear colourfully clothes that become the focus of the news story.

Reith (1927) believes that the primary mandate of a public service broadcaster the SABC should be to inform, educate and entertain society through sound and image on a massive scale. According to the latest audited AMPS figures, television viewership is now nearly 70, 5%, giving the SABC extraordinary potential to broadcast positive stories about women's lives to millions of South African homes. Ideally the SABC should also be fully funded by the state to be able to fulfil its mandate without any interference from commercial advertisers. However the reverse is true. The SABC's most recent annual report shows that it derives up to 83% of its revenue from commercial activities, 13% from licence fees and is only 4% state funded. Such a funding model effectively turns the SABC into a commercial public broadcaster. Such a funding model should also logically expose the SABC to a heightened risk of commercial interference in editorial content on one hand and minimal state interference in its editorial direction on the other.

However the situation is more complex. The SABC's dominance of the South Africa television spectrum - and of the advertising market as a result – should enable it to successfully resist advertising pressure as no advertiser can afford not to be on SABC television. But as the findings of the study show, SABC content producers seem to be single minded in their determination to please advertisers. Such acquiescence explains the tendency of the public broadcaster to emphasise the entertainment value of its news stories by portraying women mostly within a victimhood discourse on Women's Day. Images of women ravaged by disease, rural poverty and violence are more riveting and appealing to advertisers than mundane news stories purporting to educate the South African public about challenges facing women. Byerly and Ross (2006) postulate that women appear at their most interesting for the news media when they are in pain. It would also appear that such editorial content is aimed at satisfying male audiences, who also happen to be a prime target of advertisers.

As already pointed out, minimal state funding for the SABC should translate into minimal political sycophancy on the part of the public broadcaster. Yet as the findings of the study show, there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the public was not willing to be overly critical of the government's failure to effectively implement progress gender laws. It would appear that the root cause of such timidity is the lack of understanding on the part of key editorial directors at the SABC of the role of the institution's journalists as unbiased reporters and news analysts rather than political messengers or upholders of the status quo. Like most South African media houses, the SABC also publishes a substantial amount of advertisement material from the government. Although there are cases over

the research period during which senior government officials threatened to withdraw their custom from media institutions they regarded as excessively critical of state policies, the study could not find conclusive evidence of such an attitude towards the SABC.

Chapter Six

Conclusion

The study has been a desktop survey of patterns of representation of women on South Africa's main public television during Women's Months between 1999 and 2005. The study focussed on exploring patterns of women's representation in news and did not extend to an investigation of portrayals of women in commercial television nor in situational comedies, soap operas and advertisements aired by the public broadcaster. The study found that as sources and in people in the news, women are largely ignored, their experiences trivialized or are portrayed in stereotypical roles as victims of rural poverty, domestic violence, disasters, disease, mothers, housewives or passive crowds at Women's Day rallies. The study only found limited representations of women as objects of sex and people with the agency to confront conditions adversely affecting their lives. These findings largely concur with viewpoints expressed in the literature review section of the study.

The study set out to determine patterns of representations of women on SABC Television on Women's Day. Focusing on news, the study explored the extent to which key discourses and narratives associated with women as sources and people in the news, as discussed in the literature review, are plausible. The study also explored the extent to which women in television news are allowed – or not allowed – to express themselves about issues of special concern to them. The study did not look at the representation of women in commercial television nor in situational comedies, soap operas or advertisements aired by the SABC on Women's Day. The effects of representations of the women in news on television audiences also fall outside the scope of the study. For these reasons the study cannot be regarded as an exhaustive treatise of the main issues associated with the representation of women in television news.

The study found that in substantial amounts of coverage, women are either largely underrepresented as sources, journalists or people in the news or portrayed in stereotypical roles as suffering mothers, housewives, victims, people in need of government assistance, or passive crowds at Women's Day rallies. Although the study found few blatant representations of women as objects of sex; the study found that great emphasis is placed on women's physical appearance, their colourful clothing and beautiful traditional hair dresses. Women are hardly represented as strong female characters in position of authority, even inside the home; or independent, rational human beings capable of steering their own destinies. Rather women are represented in terms of their relationship with men, suggesting that in the end women are dependent on men and not capable of living their own lives without male protection and guidance. Central to all

these stereotypes and limiting roles was their presentation as a 'natural' and a given reality.

The emphasis on physical appearance and the presentation of stereotypical roles in which women are represented as the natural order of things, suggests that the news media is trying to achieve any number of objectives. Mainly the news media is trying to project itself as impartially reflecting an objective reality out there; thereby underplaying its own complicity or unwillingness to confront the inadequacies of dominant news frames. Presenting stereotypical news frames as natural also suggests to audiences that how these frames are generated, reinforced, or in whose interest they are maintained; should not be questioned. Representing women in sex-role stereotypes also suggests sex appropriate appearances, interests, skills, behaviours and self-perceptions that audiences should emulate and internalise.

As noted above, defining women in terms of their relationship with men as the news media does, implies that women are weak, dependent on men, and are incapable of living their lives without male guidance. Portraying women in stereotypical sex-roles also trivializes and ridicules their experiences and activities, implying that issues of special concern to women are neither legitimate nor significant enough to be newsworthy. It is also possible to read the representation of women in limited and demeaning roles as a backlash of patriarchy against any progress towards gender equality that could have been achieved so far and that it is an attempt instead, to keep women in a subordinate position in society. Central to all these negative constructions is a failure by the news media to value women's contribution to progress in society and to appreciate the importance of promoting gender equality.

The findings of the study add to our understanding of representations of women in news as a complex and mixed picture of women as subjects and actors in society. These finding further enhance our understanding of the need to be critical of stereotypical constructions that are presented as the natural order of things; that in fact, women's relationship with the news media are essentially a "dialectical process". The study conceives of a "dialectical process" in the Marxian sense of "a natural flux of action and reaction, of opposite, yet inseparable and interpenetrating forces" (Firestone 1970:2). What the framing of women in dialectical terms means in practice is that "progress inevitably occurs alongside recalcitrance, and backlash is a predictable part of these events" (Byerly and Ross 2006:18). These observations inevitably lead to the conclusion that the absence of women success stories in business, politics and science, for example, in favour of repetitive framings of a passive and victimized femininity is not the result of the news philosophy of particular news organisation; but cuts across the news media industry.

A number of limitations about the study need to be considered. While quantitative content analysis is suitable for managing substantial quantities of research material; it is an essentially descriptive method; and is limited in its ability to offer evaluative and historical analyses of media texts. It was mainly for this reason that qualitative methodologies like discourse and semiotics analyses; were used in combination with content analysis to make evaluative judgements about representations of women in news in the present study. However as a method, qualitative analysis also suffers from its own limitations. As Kramarae and Spender (2000) argue, the main problem of qualitative analysis as used in the study of women in media texts is that it assumes a pre-social, unified and identifiable category called 'woman' and denies the existence of women's power and agency as members of the news media audience.

In addition, as Nead (1992) has pointed out, if there is no perfect category that represents the interest of all women then "images of women in the news media could not be considered in absolute terms but rather in relation to an exploration of women's social, diverse, cultural and economic identities (1992:72). Other media scholars have also argued that focusing on images is a rather simplistic way of grappling with issues of representations "as media texts do not merely reflect society in general but also speaks to it in a complex manner" (Kramarae and Spender 2000:1099). The research sample was selective and limited to a case study of representation of women on Women's Day – when issues of gender were brought to the fore – leaving questions of representation of women in news for the rest of the year largely unexplored. As pointed above, the study did not look representation of women in commercial television nor soap operas, situational comedies or advertisements aired by the SABC. The study is also limited in terms of news medium analyised, as it not extend to a study of representations of women on radio, print or online publications.

The study has thrown up many questions that need further research and investigation. The news media's 'reflective' nature is a recurring hypothesis that has been posited by many media theorists in the literature review as the main explanation of why it persists in representing women in stereotypical roles as victims, mothers, housewives or passive subjects in news. The reflection hypothesis posits that news is a reflection of dominant values in society. Taking this hypothesis as a premise, it would be interesting and certainly add to our understanding of the way the industry is forced to work; to investigate whether South African society will support radical efforts to improve the media's representation of women or prefer the status quo, albeit in new and subtle ways. Other issues related to an investigation of societal support for changes in media representations of women that need further research are the precise nature of the role that the steadily increasing number of female media journalist should play inside newsrooms and whether the roles of female journalists should not move beyond women issues to encompass news topics regarded as 'hard news' like politics, economics, business and policy. Secondly what can media organisations do to positively influence their patterns of gender content output? What could also be investigated is whether it would be feasible for news media regulatory authorities to develop and enforce codes of acceptable images

of women in the media. In general, can the masculine narrative that is news be 'feminised'? Perhaps more importantly, is the time not appropriate to completely abandon a news philosophy that continues to undervalue the majority members of its society?

The findings of the study suggest several courses of action for improving the representation of women by the news media. First, media organisations should put in place dedicated programmes to increase the participation of female practitioners in their structures. An effective strategy of achieving this objective would be for media organisations to work closely with media colleges in training both female and male journalists in critical issues of women and the media. Once female journalists have accumulated requisites amounts of professional experience; they should be promoted to executive and decision-making positions in sufficient numbers; to positively influence patterns of gender content in their news organisations. Another effective policy recommendation would be to suggest the inauguration of an independent media watch organisation made up of concerned civil society members including media professionals and academics that closely monitors the representation and treatment of women by the news media; protest when representations are demeaning or unfair; and lobby for change. With the imminent migration from analogue to digital technology, the SABC could dedicate one of the many expected new channels to broadcastings issues of concern to women and to portraying them as active participants in societal progress. The Broadcasting Complaints Council of South Africa should expand its mandate beyond general media issues to give serious attention to improving the news media's portrayal and representation of women. To strengthen this last point the Council could develop codes of good practice that prohibit degrading images of women in the news media and prescribe standards of good gender content.

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