



Photographic Representation of Women in the Media

A Case Study of the Post

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Abstract

The under-representation of women in the media has been contested by gender activists the world over (Carter & Steinder, 2004, p. 15). Studies have indicated that women are more likely to be portrayed on advertising bill-boards than as serious news sources. Therein lies the problem. Saturated by the media, visual representation becomes a means of how to make sense of the world. If women are continually portrayed in a narrow range of roles and particularly as second-class citizens, does that not shape one's understanding of the world? More importantly, how do the women rise above that status? Being a photographer of Indian descent, the subject was of particular interest to the researcher. This paper examines the theories underpinning representation, in particular, identity, gender and the selection and production of photographs. Based on the above data, the *Post*, a national newspaper targeted at the South African Indian population, was selected as a case study. A select population of the staff at the *Post* was interviewed. The empirical research specifically examines the selection and production of photographs in the *Post*. Based on the literature and empirical data, the study maintains that there are many challenges facing the media, specifically relating to the visual representation of women. Based on the findings, the paper offers recommendations that may assist in improving techniques in the photographic process of composing, selecting and producing photographs in the *Post*.

Keywords: visual representation, gender, identity, journalism



Introduction: The problem and its setting

This study focuses on the photographic representation of women in the *Post*. It, therefore, sets out to observe the factors that are considered during the various stages of the photographic process. In brief, this study sets out to explore how women are represented in the print media, in particular the *Post*. In order to solve this research problem, the following objectives were set: (i) To review and critique the literature that informs current theories of representation and media selection and production; and (ii) To conduct empirical research with staff at the *Post*. The emphasis, however, is on the photographic processes and techniques used when photographing women. Empirical research within *Post* will reveal the factors that are considered during the various photographic processes, namely: Composition; Selection; and Production.

For many decades, women have appeared in a narrow range of roles and were often portrayed in the media as second class citizens. According to McQuail (2002, p. 101), media messages were seen as “stereotyped and carrying a predominantly patriarchal and conservative ideology or pandered to male sexuality”. The images generated by the media give one the impression that women are more valued for their ‘down-to-earth’ approach, other than viewed as an appendage to the male counterpart in the story. The researcher is concerned with the manner in which women are portrayed through photographs in the print media. What must be taken into account is that photography is merely an instrument of representation. By examining the “*representational paradigm* in more detail we can focus more closely on the condition of photographic production, the social context in which the work was created” (Hamilton, 1997, p. 79).

Of particular interest to this study is the *Post*, a weekly national newspaper targeted at a predominately Indian audience. Photographs published on the front page of selected editions of the *Post* will be the primary area of research. The process and production of images as well as editing and lay-out will be analysed through interviews with reporters, photographers and sub-editors. The study will attempt to investigate if women are portrayed as decorative add-ons or serious and valued role-players in society. Gender stereotypes are often embedded in all types of visual images, particularly in photographs, on billboards, and television



(Seidman, 2002, p. 94). While gender identity is constructed in many contexts, the study will attempt to examine how the *Post* constructs gender images and identity.

The image of women can change by the way a page is designed. There are various processes that can severely censor an image, for example: cropping, enlarging and highlighting often play an important part in the way the readers interpret or make sense of it. The photographic process of composition, including the use of lighting, varied apertures, filters, different lenses and editing, for example, cropping, enlarging, highlighting and darkening will be analysed. These processes change the meaning of photographs. Hamilton (1997, p. 86) refers to the photographic process as a “*double* process of construction”. The first part of the construction is the composition, selection and framing of the images. What follows in the second process is textual information, in other words, reports and captions accompanying the photographs. Media practitioners draw upon their own experiences and ideas regarding male and female persons, particularly “about gender roles and behaviour; about how women and men act and think; and also our beliefs about people’s physical appearance, even their body shapes” (Seidman, 2002, p. 94).

Creative director and executive director of *The Star*, Dave Hazelhurst, stresses the importance of women in positions of decision making, without which, he argues “there can be no real change, and, consequently, design can only have negative gender implications” (2002, p. 110). According to Hazelhurst (2002, p. 110), “nothing sets the tone of paper more than pictures” and “everyone is involved – news editors, reporters, copy-tasters, editors, layout-subs, picture editors and copy-subs”. It seems therefore, that editors and sub-editors do have a choice in the portrayal of women. It appears that women portrayed in the front pages of the *Post* seem conservative in demeanour, frequently perceived as an appendage to their husbands, almost as an add-on and not a ‘stand alone’. I believe the *Post* could do well to address these injustices. It is within this context that this paper sets out to examine the representation of women in the print media.

The initial stage of the photographic process is the composition of a photograph. The photographer demonstrates the factors that are considered during the composition of a photograph. The second stage of the photographic process is the selection of the photograph. The sub-editor is tasked with this process. The sub-editor will illustrate what factors are considered when selecting a photograph. The final stage of the photographic process is the



production of the photograph. The result is the production of the image on the printed page. Based on the findings from the literature review and the empirical investigation, the paper offers recommendations.



Media Selection and Production of Photographs in *The Post*

The act of representation is an ancient practice. It has always been part of mankind's social practice, from sophisticated cave paintings and carvings to intricate jewellery. Whilst representation was previously restricted to art galleries and places of worship, the physical and technical production of representations was revolutionized in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century. It was the photographic camera that led to this transformation. Visual representations are now on display on buses, buildings, bill boards, and lamp-posts and in shopping malls (Reid, 2008, p. 208). In fact, for most people in the western and developing world, life is saturated with visual images and representations. It is, after all, how we communicate with one another and, more importantly, make sense of the world. Williams (2003, p. 121) maintains that audiences have learnt to actively filter such masses of representations on a constant basis in order to try to receive only those meanings which were important to them. If this is the case, are women, in general, aware of how they are represented in the media? The researcher finds it necessary to explore ways in which the South African media report and *re-present* the social world in order to examine the impact of the media on their audiences. The case study is the *Post*, a national weekly newspaper. In the past, the media in South Africa was under tremendous strain as society was polarized and unequal. The South African media had to contend with social, political and economical conditions in a country with disparaging proportions. Understandably, the subject of gender representations did not seem to be a priority in the media and women of colour were particularly at a disadvantage. However, since democratization, gender representation in the South African media has received considerable attention.

The origins of the Post

The *Post* has been in operation since 1960. Launched as *Golden City POST* by Sir Jim Bailey in 1955, it set off at a time when the apartheid ideology was just beginning to tighten its grip on society (Howard, 2005, p. 3). The *Post* highlighted the political struggle and made mockery of laws like the Immorality Act, the Mixed Marriages Act and the Group Areas Act. It also highlighted bannings, house arrests and imprisonment of political leaders, the battle to get South Africa expelled from world sport, and the birth of the Black Consciousness Movement". It led to the change of the *Post's* slogan from "paper for the people" to the "voice and heart of the community". In fact, the *Post* is the biggest-selling weekly newspaper



servicing the Indian Diaspora in South Africa. It expresses the views, fears, threats and aspirations of the Indian community. The Consul General of India, emphasizes the role of the *Post* as it also helps sustain the historical linkages between India and South Africa. In doing so, the newspaper has helped the local Indian community in preserving and maintaining its cultural heritage and traditions. According to Swarup, the *Post* has been a forerunner in the struggle against colonialism, imperialism, inequality and racial discrimination. It has helped the community in preserving and maintaining its cultural heritage and traditions (Swarup, 2005, p. 5).

However, the democratic era of the 1990s soon changed the perceptions that Indians were a homogeneous group. There was a “resurgence of ethnic and sub-ethnic identities (class, language, religion, geographic origins)” (Maharaj, 2007, p. 19). Today, while the older generation upholds the values and traditions of their fore-fathers, the younger generation is quite often modern and westernized, in thinking and in dress. Herein lies the dichotomy. The *Post* upholds the values and traditions of the Indian culture, however, is it possible that it does have a fixed notion of what an Indian woman ought to be like? Meanings, therefore, will always change, from one culture or period to another (Hall, 1997, p. 61). Has the *Post* adjusted its stance in its representation of women and forged ahead with the modern times, or has it lagged behind? The main thrust of the argument is, how are women represented through photographs in the *Post*? Is the *Post* bound to the traditional and cultural views of the past? Of significance are the photographic images of women in the *Post*. Visual signs and images carry meaning and, therefore, have to be interpreted (Hall, 1997, p. 21). After all, meaning is produced through representation. However, photographs are nearly always constructed within a social context. Of particular interest to the research, is to ascertain how women are photographed and portrayed in the *Post*. The researcher aims to examine the process of photographic production and the social context by which it was created (Hamilton, 1997, p. 79). Posed questions, will give the researcher an indication of how the *Post* production team, made up of reporters, photographers and sub-editors, select, process and produce photographic images

Media selection and production



The term “gatekeeping” has been widely used to describe the method by which selections are made in the media. For the most part, gatekeepers decide what is going to appear and how it is going to appear in the media. Gate-keeping also applies to the different kinds of editorial and production done in print and television. It refers to the power to grant or deny access to different voices in society and is often an area of conflict (McQuail, 2002, p. 276). The weakness in the concept of gatekeeping argues McQuail (2002, p. 276), is that there is generally one main set of selection criteria and its tendency to individualize decision-making. Len-Rios et al. (2005, p. 155) suggest that under-representation of women is intricately connected to news production. Apart from selection and emphasis or placement, gatekeepers can also insert and delete material into existing news reports. According to Oosthuizen (2001, p. 198), ideally, editors ought to perform their tasks in accordance with the broad guidelines laid down by their board of directors. However, if they do not keep to these guidelines, it can lead to conflict. It is therefore apparent, that editors can act as strict gatekeepers in that they can discard or ignore stories or news items that do not conform to their own beliefs or policies. News and photographs can be distorted in this way.

Williams (2003, p. 153) maintains that people with political and economic power use ideology to maintain their privileged positions. Similarly, media owners shape the messages that the media produce. Thus the hegemonic hierarchy remains. It follows then that as Williams (2003, p. 155) notes, Barthes argued that the media, through their ability to make images and signs work, disseminate an ideological view of the world. “Between the very broad, general conditions and power relations in the world and the ideological messages which shape media texts that are delivered to audiences is an important system of production” (Carter & Steiner, 2004, p. 15). The question to ask is how media discourses contribute or challenge the “structural (re) production of gender inequalities” (Carter & Steiner, 2004, p. 14). Some of the questions to ask would be: Which audiences are being served? Are women and men addressed differently, via texts with different varieties of intellectual and emotional content? If newspapers under-represent women, do they then add to the public approval of male cultural hegemony? It seems therefore, that women are excluded from a significant symbol of power (Len-Rios et al., 2005, p. 152). Furthermore, the media constructs, presents and even dictates what ‘reality’ is, as well as what is ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ (Karam, 2008, p. 317). Dominant groups use the media to reinforce their definition of normality and reality.



The underlying question, therefore, is how are women represented visually? Interestingly, the management at *The Star* saw the need to change their policies for several reasons. One of the most important reasons was the large number of competent women in positions of power (Hazelhurst, 2002, p. 110). Hazelhurst came to the conclusion that there can be no real change without women in decision-making jobs. He argued that newspaper design could have negative gender implications. The employment and promotion policies could assist by legitimately empowering women. South African women have for many years, experienced the newsroom as a hostile environment, particularly because they have been patronized and marginalized. Even though working conditions for women have advanced considerably, it seems as though women have reached the ‘glass ceiling’.

Today, photographers use new methods of representing subject matter. The camera was always considered to be like a ‘mirror held up to Nature’ (Hamilton, 1997, p.79). However, we can focus more closely on the condition of photographic production. For instance, through the use of colour filters, framing or highlighting a photograph does not necessarily reflect the subject matter in its entirety. The photograph is not longer the ‘true image’ of the world (Hamilton, 1997, p. 79). Fiske (1990, p. 16) maintains that photographs are open to a number of readings, in other words, they are polysemic. The photographer, through his or her personal interpretations, chooses which events or subjects to place in front of the camera. Hamilton (1997, p. 85) maintains that often a “*double* process of construction at work”. First, the photographer constructs and frames the image. Thereafter, there is a second process of construction, where photographs are selected out from their original ordering and placed within the confines of a caption. According to Fiske (1990, p. 110), Barthes uses the term *anchorage* to describe the function of words used as captions for photographs. Visual images, he argues, are polysemic: ‘they imply, underlying their signifiers, a floating chain of signifieds, and the reader able to choose some and ignore others’. However, Williams (2003, p. 153) makes mention of Hall’s input and how influential it was in shaping research into the reception and production of media messages. According to Williams (2003, p. 153), Hall argued that the media and their audiences play a part in the process of producing ideological meaning. It also introduced the concept of the media being a “site of struggle over the production of meaning”.



Representation of photographic images influences gender identity. The selection and production of photographs may have an impact on the portrayal of women and, accordingly influence the identity of women. The triangular relationships among texts, media organizations and industries, and audiences' practices were examined. Of significance, was an overview of the *Post*; *Women in the Media*; and finally, the *Selection and Production of Photographs*. Having discussed the triangular relationships among texts and images, the *Post* and its readers, the researcher proceeds to look at the methodology used to conduct the empirical study.



Research Methodology

This study has made use of open-ended questions in the interview schedules as methods that were used to collect data in a qualitative study. It is for this reason that the method of qualitative research was used. Personal interviews were conducted. This study was limited to interviews of the staff of *Post*. Audience analyses were not conducted. Only a sample of a population is selected for any given study in qualitative research. The staff of *Post* comprises ten staff members, an editor, two sub-editors, five reporters and one administrator. This study, therefore, identified the sub-editor, photographer and two women reporters of the *Post* in order to obtain valid findings. These personnel were representative of the *Post* staff. Although there was much discussion around the readers, the study did not explore audience analysis. It was limited to the selected personnel at *Post* and not its readers. Therefore, for this study, primary data were collected through an empirical study using a standardised interview and secondary data were collected by conducting a review of related literature. The interview schedule comprised open-ended and semi - structured questions. Follow-up questions were useful to clarify the response from the interviewees. The triangulation method of collecting data was used. Triangulation data are drawn from different sources (Flick, 2004, p. 178). It usually refers to combining multiple theories, observers, methods, and empirical materials to produce a more accurate, objective and comprehensive representation of the aim of study (Silverman, 2006, p. 291).

The researcher was given access to archives of the *Post*. Three editions of *Post* were chosen as staff at *Post* specifically highlighted photographs used in these issues (Photographs A, B and C). Photograph A was chosen to illustrate that the decision making process was often male dominated. Although the female senior reporter preferred a different photograph, the editor and photographer (both male) seemed to disregard her choice. Photograph B was a photograph selected by all staff to depict that their newspaper had deviated from the norm by publishing a photograph of an Indian woman clad in a bikini costume. It was stressed however that the photograph was used because the model was a Sharks Flasher Girl (a cheer leader for the local provincial rugby team The Sharks). Photograph C was selected by the female senior reporter to demonstrate that it was indeed rare for a male to appear on the front cover of the *Post* unless it is a Bollywood star, as was the case in the photograph.



The researcher was also handed a 2008 Research Survey which included the AMPS and readership profile demographics. In addition, the researcher photocopied a thirty-two page supplement celebrating *Post's* 50 years in circulation. This supplement proved to be an invaluable source as it contained the rich history of the *Post*. This study, therefore, used the triangulation method of collecting data as it was considered to be the most appropriate. As the interviews were conducted, the answers were recorded manually by the researcher. In addition, interviews were audio recorded. The interviews were then transcribed by the researcher. Thereafter, the data were prepared for interpretation and analysis. The interviews were coded according to the various themes that the literature review sited. The researcher read through the interviews and identified the issues that were set out to be explored in the research. Unexpected generalizations in the course of data analysis lead one to seek out new deviant (unusual – unexpected) cases (Silverman, 2006, p. 303) and go against the pattern identified. Silverman suggests that researchers ought to overcome any tendency to select a case which is likely to support their argument.

Findings and Analysis

A thematic analysis of the data obtained from the empirical study follows. It further provides a discussion of these findings and sets the platform for the analysis and recommendations of the study. The research methodology confines the empirical research to interviews of those who produce the paper i.e. the photographers; sub-editor and reporter. The findings are, therefore, reported according to these interviews.

The integral role of composition plays in the photographic process

Images are often manipulated through 'cut and paste', cropping, highlighting, darkening and lightening. What factors are considered during photographic processes? The findings revealed that in composing a photograph, the photographer's key consideration during photographing a woman revolves around the physical beauty of the subject. Literature states that the photographer's influence – framing, focus, lighting and camera angle, - produces a subjective element in the final sign, the photograph (Fiske, 1990, p. 110). It also seems apparent that men and women are viewed differently, when composing a photograph. According to the findings, it seems as though images are framed according to what is important to the media workers and what is suitable for the newspaper. This is, therefore,



Evidence suggests that the *Post* photographer has to work within certain boundaries. According to the findings, it suggests that the photographer “cannot show any ‘flesh’” and, secondly, “the woman must be appealing but not ‘sexy’ appealing”. These remarks stem from management’s view of the *Post*. According to the editor, the *Post* changed its “racy, sexy *Golden City Post* (Natal) image” to become far more family oriented (Ramguthee, 2005, p. 1). In addition, one of the main strategies of *Post*’s management was to eliminate the image *Post* had acquired, that of publishing pictures of attractive young women on page three. Therefore, the above evidence suggests that the *Post* photographer has certain limitations and restrictions that he has to adhere to. Literature of Hall (1993, p. 98) maintains that the sphere of ‘preferred readings’ have the “whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of ‘how things work for all practical purposes in this culture’, the rank order of power and interest”. Based on literature by Ramguthee (2005, p. 1), it seems apparent that *Post*’s management has taken a stance on its views on women, and could therefore imply that society follows its example. Fiske (1990, p. 112) elaborates on Hall’s theory, stating that the dominant system is the preferred readings of society as it is one that conveys the dominant values.

strengthened by *Post*’s management’s decision of how women are represented in the *Post*. The photographer’s influence – framing, focus, lighting and camera angle, - produces a subjective element in the final sign. However, based on the above response, it seems as though the sub-editor of the *Post* makes use of these various techniques to enhance the photograph and not necessarily to change its meaning.

Selection of photographs is predominantly (if not only) done by the males. The term gate-keeping describes the methods by which selection are made in media. It also refers to the power to grant or deny access to different voices in society, it is often an area of conflict. This is evident in the following excerpts of the interview with *Post* photographer:

- *A typical example would be what happened in this week’s issue, the collage of three Ms India finalists. Now, one of the girls, looked sultry, so we said let’s reduce that picture. We blew up the pictures of the other two women. But the sizes in which we used the pictures were different. The editor and I decided,*



we didn't want the sultry look, we wanted a more smiling face. The sultry look doesn't work – it might look sexy or whatever, but it doesn't work with us. So we reduced that picture (the girl with the sultry look) (Photograph A).

- *We like to be politically correct in terms of gender and stuff like that, but your personal preference comes in now and then. For example, on that particular story, a girl (senior woman reporter) looked at that picture and said “but that girl looks pretty, why don't you blow that picture up?” But when it came to the decision making, the editor went for that and I supported him and we went that route. So there is that latitude of how you can place pictures but it's obviously influenced by our thoughts, and what we think the public would want to see.*
- *When it came to selecting the photograph, there are two men and one woman. The woman didn't argue her point, although she did mention, well, let's look at that picture (the sultry picture). Both of us laughingly said to her: “hey, ask a man to judge beauty”. It was done in jest, but in the end that's what actually happened. That's what determined the way we placed the pictures.*
- *And I've heard of our girls (female reporters) often joking asking us ‘hey, you know what, I want to see the six-pack, where's the abs.’? I think the editor is okay with that, but not okay with women showing more. Then again, maybe it's personal preference. I'm sure if it goes to the editor, depending on his frame of mind, he'll say this is not on, this is not Post. You have a conservative readership out there, but the readership is changing. We have younger people out there and people identify with it, it's not a case of us pushing it down someone's throat. I think newspapers should be reflective and not pushing something down and to basically handle pictures like that, if they're sent through, I don't see a problem with that because this is the way we dress today.*



- *From a policy point of view, we are aware of women's rights and the contribution they make but I think just as much as women like to see 'six packs' on men, men like to see a pretty face on the front page.*

Based on the findings regarding the selection of photographs, it is evident that there is a bias towards the opinions of the males in the newsroom, in this instance the photographer and the editor. A senior woman reporter's suggestion as to which photograph ought to be published was simply ignored. In fact she was told, "ask a man to judge beauty". It seems that even within the newsroom there seems to be contestation during the selection and production of photographs (also known as gate-keeping). It seems that there is also a tendency to individualize decision making. Literature (Len-Rios et al., 2005, p. 155) suggests that the under-representation of women is connected to news production. Apart from selection and emphasis or placement, gatekeepers can also insert and delete material into existing news reports. According to Oosthuizen, (2001, p. 198), ideally, editors ought to perform their tasks in accordance with the broad guidelines laid down by their board of directors. However, if they do not keep to these guidelines, it can lead to conflict. It is, therefore, obvious that editors can act as strict gatekeepers and that they can discard or ignore stories or news items that do not conform to their own beliefs or policies. Based on the findings, the photographer's view that a photograph will be used depending on the "editor's frame of mind at that time" is evident that a photograph or story has to conform with the editor's own beliefs, or else it is not used. Literature by De Beer and Botha (2008, p. 153) suggests that the placement of a photograph within the newspaper also plays a large role in agenda setting. When the same sign appears for long periods, week after week, it then becomes possible to "better identify the agenda of a news organization" (De Beer & Botha, 2008, p. 238).

The literature of Baderoon (2003, p. 315) suggests that the media always tell a particular story. They encode a particular way of looking at the world. Seidman (2002, p. 94) maintains that media practitioners draw upon their own experiences and notions about male and female persons regarding many factors, for instance, gender roles, behaviour, how women and men think and act, and our beliefs about body shapes. It is, therefore, important for women to be in positions of decision making. Hazelhurst (2002, p. 110) argues that without women at the helm of decision making, there can be very little change.

Photograph A



Figure 1. Ms India 2008 Hopefuls. The model with the sultry look. *POST* 16 October 2008

Women have been misrepresented in the media

The representation of women in the media has always been a point of contestation. Based on the comments of the chief photographer: “we’re looking for sex, even if it means a pretty face that goes on the front page”, it is evident that *Post* perceives a woman as commodities. In other words, without the “pretty face”, the product, which is the newspaper, will not sell. The sub-editor states that for the past eight years there has always been a picture of a woman on the front page ‘be it glamour or murder’. Based on the findings, it seems that women are



perceived as either ‘victims’ or decorative add-ons and not as serious role-players in society. Literature by Seidman (2002, p. 94) supports this view as she maintains that “gender stereotypes are heavily embedded in all forms of visual images”. The visual image has a powerful effect on how one views the world. In addition, according to the sub-editor, photographs of beauty pageants bring out the ‘brightness of the paper’ and these images are used to attract more male readers. Media texts do not merely mirror or reflect ‘reality’, but instead construct hegemonic meaning of what should be accepted as ‘reality’. These meanings appear to be ‘real’, inevitable and full of common sense. Not surprisingly though, feminists have drawn on the concept of hegemony in order to argue that most of us cannot see how patriarchal ideology is made to appear as ‘objective’, non-gendered’ and ‘neutral’ and ‘non-ideological’.

With this in mind, it seems as though staff members at *Post* are responsible for what is produced in the paper and readers tend to accept the newspaper as the ‘norm’ and as a mirror of ‘reality’. A key point to remember is that hegemonic realities must be constantly reconstructed, contested, renegotiated and renaturalized (Carter & Steinder, 2004, p. 2). Literature by Fiske (1990, p. 16) implies that photographs are open to a number of readings, in other words, they are polysemic. They are never as easy to decode as they may appear. On a technical level, the context makes the picture easier to decode, especially at a quick, first glance. Literature, by Carter & Steinder (2004, p. 14), suggests that sexist stereotypes encourage people to believe that women are suited to ‘traditional’ female sex roles. The findings reveal that “blood and guts sell” and “it’s mainly the women who are victims”. These views are supported by the literature of Morna et al., (2002, p. 96). According to research within the media in Southern African (Morna et al., 2002, p. 96), more women are shown as victims, receivers and helpless sufferers rather than women who are “makers and shakers”. These stereotypes, therefore, discourage people from accepting women who are independent, strong and self-confident. It also inhabits women’s ability to realize their full professional and personal potential. The fundamental problem, therefore, lies in the representation of women in the *Post*.



Deviant Case (1)

Unexpected generalizations in the course of data analysis lead one to seek out new deviant (unusual – unexpected) cases. When asked if there were such cases, the following response was given by the photographer/sports-editor:

- *The Post carried a picture of a bikini-clad girl for the first time on the back page three weeks ago. It took us back to the days of the Golden City POST, but I managed to ‘smuggle’ the picture through because of the story. She was a ‘Sharks flasher girl’ and as a ‘flasher girl’, that’s what you do, show some bikini. (Photograph B)*
- *It was a preview to the Sharks-Bulls final and the Sharks players weren’t available for the picture, so to supplement the story with the picture, we said there’s an Indian girl, our market, who does this – as a flasher girl.*
- *But I think under any other circumstances, that picture may not have been used. Yes, it went through the editor, but because it was part of the story, she is a Sharks Flasher Girl, that’s what she does.*
- *With that in mind, I think that’s how we managed to push that through. But just to get a girl to pose on the front page in a bikini – I don’t think we’ll do that. Because this had a story to it, and the picture basically told the story, so it was accepted.*
- *So there are areas, we find, where we can ‘sneak’ our way through. (Regarding the ‘Sharks flasher girl’ picture) - In my experience with the paper, by and large, men would have ogled at it, women would’ve said ‘look at her body’.*

Based on the above findings, it is evident that photographers do face certain challenges. Whilst it was an important provincial rugby game, the sports editor still had to ‘smuggle’ the photograph as it went against the ethos of the newspaper. The *Post* aspires to be family

orientated and far more acceptable to all members of a house-hold than the *Golden City Post*. However, had this photograph been taken whilst the *Golden City Post* was in circulation, it would not have been a problem. The “racy, sexy *Golden City Post* (Natal)” changed its body shape and face” as the “strategy was to eliminate the image *Post* had acquired, that is, publishing pictures of attractive young women on page three” (Ramguthee, 2005, p. 1). In the literature by Silverman (2006, p. 309), he notes that deviant cases go against the pattern identified. Research into the *Post* has ascertained that women seem to be portrayed as traditional and conservative. The case identified above, seems to go against the grain and proves otherwise. Surprisingly for the staff at *Post*, there were apparently no complaints from the readers.

It is evident that deviant cases do create a ‘stir’ in the newsroom. These negative instances offer a crucial test to the theory. The case study of the ‘Sharks Flasher Model’ (Photograph B) seems to have surprised many staff. Interestingly, the respondent mentions that the model had a flag around her, suggesting that the flag was ‘wrapped’ around her, thereby ‘lessening’ the impact of her bikini-clad body. However, upon examination of the photograph, it appears that the flag was used as a backdrop as it was positioned behind her. The findings indicate that it seems as though the editor is conservative and of ‘the old school’. Although the deviant case, identified below, seems to prove otherwise and go against the grain. The *Post* ought to take responsibility for representing women in a way that will help to break the shackles of patriarchy. Sexist stereotypes encourage people to believe that women are suited “only (and always) to so-called ‘traditional’ female sex roles and discourage people from accepting women who are strong, assertive, independent and self-confident, thus inhibiting women’s ability to realize their full personal and professional potential (Carter & Steiner, 2004, p. 14). Therefore, the fundamental problem lies in the misrepresentation of women. “What does it mean to live as a woman? To what extent does gender – our own identities as male and female, shape our experience of the culture around us?” (Parry & Karam, 2001, p.383).

Photograph B

FOR ALL YOUR
results and fixtures
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PO

Sharks look to a hard bite

WHEN we talk about great battles in the sporting world, thoughts of Federer and Nadal on the tennis courts, India and Australia on the cricket field and Manchester United and Liverpool in soccer come to mind. The epic Sharks/Bulls battles of the past can match any of the above, and the 4pm date they have in Saturday's Absa Currie Cup final has all the ingredients of a contest to reach titanic proportions. Reservoir Hills Rhinos tighthead prop and rugby fundi VERNON CHETTY, who is also the manager of the KwaZulu Natal Junior Sharks and Duikers team and who has aspirations to one day manage the Sharks outfit, analyses the strengths of both teams and calls the match for **POST**.

"IN THE front rows we have a fantastic battle with the two Springboks locking horns – Beast Mtawarira for the Sharks against Gurthro Steenkamp of

tional class front row of Jannie Du Plessis, Bismarck Du Plessis, Mtawarira, Deon Carstens and John Smit. In the lineouts the Bulls hold a massive advantage. Springbok captain Victor Matfield is a colossal force to reckon with in this department. Johan Muller and Steven Sykes will have to lift their game to compete against the Bulls here. In the battle of the loose forwards, we have a mouth watering tussle with Jacques Botes, Ryan Kankowski and Jean Deyssel of the Sharks against Wikus van Heerden, Pierre Spies and Dannie Rossouw of the Bulls. It's going to be a contest of the Bulls' brute strength against the agility and flair of the Sharks. I think we will edge this battle especially when later on in the game we bring on our "supersub" Keegan Daniel. At the half back you have Fourie Du Preez and Morne Steyn against Ruan Pienaar and Frederic Michalak for the Sharks. The Sharks should win this battle with the finesse and tenacity our half backs have. The midfield mêlée will see the Sharks' Francois Steyn against Wynand Olivier. Will Steyn redeem himself after

Sharks flasher girl Yosheen Govender and mascot Mr Sharkle will be cheering on their team on Saturday

Picture: NINEY RUTHNAM

I believe Steyn has what it takes to land a 60m drop goal and accumulate the points to bring home the cup. In the wings we have Bryan Habana versus JP Peterson and the expected battle of the twins, Odwa (Sharks) and Akona Ndungane for the Bulls seems to be a non-starter for these sprint machines after the latter failed a fitness test. However, it remains to be seen whether Akona is really injured or is part of pre-match gamesman-

against the youthful Zane Kirchner. I think here, Terblanche will come out tops. He's been performing like a 20-year-old this season, playing awesome rugby at 35. Coach John Plumtree and his team of experts in charge of conditioning the Sharks have done a sterling job this season and the players are primed to produce the desired results. And finally, I will stick my neck out and call the match 25/17 in favour of the Sharks.

Figure 2. Yosheen Govender – the “Sharks Flasher Girl” – *POST* 3 October 2008



Deviant Case (2)

Another unusual case was a front page photograph with male Bollywood star, Upen Patel. This photograph went against the identified pattern. When the senior female reporter was asked why this case was unusual, the following response was given:

- *I always tell them (the editor and sub-editor) that I would like to see a picture of a handsome man on the front page. No one listens to me. It'll be a total change. It'll only happen if someone won Mr Bollywood. It'll be a total change.*
- *Women don't always want to see a picture of a pretty woman on the front page of the newspaper. We had Upen Patel, but it was a big stand alone – there were four little girls surrounding him at a religious event.*
- *It was nice to see a male for a change, on the front page and it had nothing to do with a man being killed or having him kill someone. It's very seldom that you're going to see a male on the front page, unless Bollywood actor Shahruk Khan comes to Durban. That's the only time we'll use pictures of men on the front page. Local men are only used as a 'stand alone' on the front page, for example if they've won the Mr India competition.*

Based on the above response, it is evident that deviant cases do pose a challenge for the staff at *Post*. However, as there were no complaints reported, one begs to ask – are the gate-keepers in 'sync'/ step with their audience? Comments by staff have indicated that women, pictured in the *Post*, seem to be portrayed as traditional and conservative. The case identified above seems to go against the grain and prove otherwise. In response to the sub-editors comment on the *Post* possessing an 'Indian element', cultural experiences of the reader, for example, his or her class, background, ethnicity and gender, impact heavily on the process of negotiating the text, which is made up of codes and signs. For instance, different newspapers report the same event according to how their target audiences' understanding of the world. In other words, readers from different cultures or different social standings may experience different meanings in the same text (Fiske, 1990, p. 3).

Photograph C



Figure 3. Bollywood Film Star – Upen Patel on the front page of the POST - 16 August 2008

Conclusions and Recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations are based on the literature review and the empirical study. The conclusions and recommendations are presented on the key themes identified in the literature review and used in the research instrument.

- Photographs in the *Post* present a one dimensional stereotype. It is, therefore, recommended that photographers consider improving techniques in the photographic process of composing, selecting and producing photographs in the *Post*.



- The selection of photographs was done predominately by men. It is, therefore, recommended that women reporters and junior reporters participate in the selection of photographs. This process would thereby ensure that photographs are more reflective of a changing society.
- Photographs of women on the front cover of *Post* reflect ‘beauty or blood’. It is, therefore, recommended that the staff find alternative photographs depicting the modern Indian woman.
- It is recommended that photographers and staff at *Post* consider attending a gender course hosted by Genderlinks, a gender based organization that trains media workers on issues of gender and gender sensitivity.

Based on the above conclusions, the study therefore recommends that staff at the *Post* pay particular attention to the portrayal of women as many Indian women are modern, out-going career women. Audience surveys ought to be conducted to gauge how Indian women would like to be portrayed on the front pages of the *Post*. The selection of photographs should include women and junior reporters. It would appear that when women are at the helm of decision making, there is special consideration given to gender sensitivity. The policy of selection and production of photographs at the *Post*, should be reviewed to become a wider process to include more reporters. The policy should consider the younger career orientated readers. Finally, photographs published in the *Post* ought to reflect today’s modern Indian women. This study was only limited to photographs in the *Post*. The study recommends an in-depth look into audience analysis research of the *Post*. In addition, the researcher recommends a broader study into the representation of women in the mass media.



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