

Discourses of sexual violence against black lesbians: A media analysis

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Abstract

Sexual violence against lesbians has been on the increase in recent years despite our progressive constitution. While research on sexual violence against black lesbians has already been conducted, this study aims to add new insight to literature regarding the role of the media in the discursive constructions of sexual violence. This research aims to explore how sexual violence against black lesbians is represented in South African print media. Social constructionism and intersectional feminism were the theoretical frameworks employed and thematic discourse analysis was utilized as the analytic framework. Purposive sampling was used to obtain newspaper articles from the *SA Media* electronic database for the period 1994 to 2017 (the database only yielded articles from 2003 onwards). The three themes that emerged from the analysis include: (1) Constructions of sexual violence as a 'lesson' and curative, (2) lesbian identities as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity and (3) (re)victimisation and the absence of justice. Findings indicate that newspaper reporting contained punitive discourses that served to sustain rape culture, tended to repeatedly sensationalise the brutality of incidences and continually conveyed the lack of safety and justice, neglecting alternative empowering narratives. Although reports advocate for human rights, it largely tended to further marginalise black lesbians. This study advocates for more ethical journalistic attempts as many discourses used still serve to render their agency invisible which has implications for the eradication of gendered and sexual violence in South Africa.

Keywords: Sexual violence; black lesbians; print media analysis; social constructionism; intersectional feminism; thematic discourse analysis; South Africa.

Introduction

In recent years, sexual violence against lesbians has been on the rise in South Africa. The Global HIV Prevention Group reports that since 1998, there have been 31 recorded murders of lesbian women in the country with only one murder resulting in conviction (2007 as cited in Mieses, 2009). Despite the country's progressive legislation and being dubbed the *Rainbow Nation* as a result, gender discrimination, rape and the murder of homosexual women still prevail and these numbers do not seem to be decreasing (Brown, 2012). Women are too often the targets of sexual violence. The organisation People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) argue that it is estimated that almost half of all South African women will be raped during their lifetime (as cited in Martin, Kelly, Turquet, & Ross, 2009). The issue of gender violence poses a considerable public health risk in South Africa as it undermines women's right and their ability to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV and possibly suicide (Mieses, 2009).

“Corrective rape” has been described as a practice that involves raping gender-non conforming individuals in an effort to “cure” or “rectify” their sexual orientation (Boeshart, 2014; Brown, 2012; Koraan & Geduld, 2015; & Martin et al., 2009). This description is categorised by hetero-patriarchal indicators that reinforce the harmful attitudes and beliefs about lesbian identities in South Africa (Lake, 2014) as it conveys the message that sexuality can be changed through sexually violent attacks. Consequently, this undermines the problematic nature of incidences.

The problem of sexual violence against lesbians is not merely limited to gender and sexuality, but it is a human rights violation that South Africa should be at the forefront of defending. The advanced constitution treasures human dignity and safety on paper, but in reality when it comes to the social justice of those affected, it fails to uphold these principles (Brown, 2012; Martin et al., 2009; & Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy, & Moletsane, 2010).

Black lesbian women in South Africa experience the intersections and related oppressions of their racial, sexual orientation and gendered identities. This is called *intersectionality* and it serves to shed light on these experiences and identities that should not be considered in isolation, but as parts that make up an entire identity (Crenshaw, 1991). These coinciding systems of subjugation are what make black lesbians especially vulnerable to the targets of hate crime. Since black lesbians challenge gender and the heterosexual status quo, they often bear the brutal consequences thereof (Brown, 2012; Human Rights Watch,

2011; Martin et al., 2009; Matebeni, 2015; & Reddy, Potgieter, & Mkhize, 2007). The pervasive nature of hetero-patriarchal power and control never cease when issues of gender and sexual orientation surface as a result of the pervading influence they have on all structures of society. This influence exacerbates issues of violence against women which causes further marginalisation, the maintenance of patriarchal power and sometimes the prevention of the production of alternative narratives about what it means to be a man or woman in South Africa.

The following review aims to provide a synthesis of local and international empirical and theoretical work on sexual violence against lesbians. The structure of the review will firstly explore the issue of sexual violence against black lesbians in the context of post-apartheid South Africa, secondly lesbian women's experiences of prejudice and victimisation, and thirdly research on newspaper reports on sexual violence against lesbians. Describing sexual violence against black lesbians in post-apartheid South African context provides a background for the context of the current state of intolerance, brutality and discrimination.

Defining sexual violence against black lesbians in the context of post-apartheid South Africa

Issues of gender inequality, homophobia and violence are deeply entrenched in South African society due to the longstanding history of colonialism and apartheid (Brown, 2012; Moffett, 2006). Racist colonial discourse has constructed the African body and sexuality as barbaric, grotesque and hypersexual in contrast to white bodies and sexuality as civilised, pure and the epitome of beauty (Abrahams, 1998; Lewis, 2011). Colonial and early anthropological discourse has "othered" African existence through the marked visibility of their bodies. Sarah Baartman whose body was dehumanised and made available for voyeuristic consumption is one such example of the way in which African female body was deemed inferior (Abrahams, 1998; Henderson, 2014; Lewis, 2005, 2011). These stereotypes still exist in contemporary popular news, media and even in academia (Lewis, 2011). Consequently, it is evident why early representations of Africans are essential to understanding current taboos, attitudes and laws about African sexuality and sexual pleasure (McFadden, 2003).

In South Africa, the sexual violence perpetrated against gender non-conforming individuals in order to "fix" their supposed deviant sexual orientation is erroneously termed "corrective rape" (Boeshart, 2014; Brown, 2012; Koraan; & Geduld, 2015; Martin et al., 2009; & Van der Schyff, 2015). The term itself implies that something is wrong and, therefore

should be rectified. Employing such terms sets the tone that allows for the urgency and impact that these violent attacks have in the individuals affected to be undermined (Hames, 2011; van der Schyff, 2015). It is important to acknowledge the problematic use of language and terminology that obliterates dignity and humanness (Hames, 2011; UNAIDS, 2015).

Currently, many Africans view homosexuality as a colonial imported idea; however, the roots of same-sex attraction can be traced back to before the arrival of Western settlers (Brown, 2012; Msibi, 2011; Morrissey, 2013). Homosexuality is not a western construct, but a way of being that is suppressed by the privileging of heteronormativity (Msibi, 2011). It is this belief together with patriarchy and misogyny that fuel homophobic attacks on gender non-conforming individuals. (Van der Schyff, 2015).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the prevalence of violence against women is amongst the highest in the world (Boeshart, 2014). There is an overwhelming amount of support when it comes to the prevention of violence against women and children, but issues of discrimination against black lesbians in particular are invisible and disregarded as insignificant, not only by the public, but by the police and health care official as well (Reddy et al., 2007). Gender non-conforming individuals report that in their visits to police stations to report crime, they found the police to be unsympathetic, untrustworthy and homophobic. Furthermore, they report that their cases are dismissed and they are ridiculed by police officials (Human Rights Watch, 2011; Kwesi & Webster, 1998; & Reid & Dirsuweit, 2002). Incidences of violence against black lesbian women rarely make the public domain. Only a few cases, such as the highly publicised murder investigation of the South African soccer player, Eudy Simelane who was brutally raped and murdered in 2008 in the township of Kwa-Thema in Johannesburg make the news (Brown, 2012; Human Rights Watch, 2011; & Reddy et al., 2007).

Experiences of prejudice and victimisation

Experiences of discrimination and assault against lesbians construct them as ‘victims’ rather than survivors (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015). This simple language modification could transform the way they perceive themselves and give rise to feelings of empowerment. This could also affect the way society views them. In a participatory photovoice study documenting young black lesbian and bisexual women’s resistance to the dominant narratives of their sexuality in South Africa, researchers found that the perpetual discourses of what it means to oppose gender norms portray sexual minorities as disempowered victims, but neglect to demonstrate the positive aspects of their lives that they find solace in (Zway &

Boonzaier, 2015). Additionally, there is the concern that this diminishes their agency and disregards their lived realities (Zway & Boonzaier, 2015).

Morris and Balsam (2003) examined the prevalence of several victimization experiences among a large, ethnically diverse American sample of white, black, Asian and native Indian lesbian and bisexual women. They found that 62.3% of participants reported incidences of discrimination because of their sexual orientation. The type of victimisation (sexual and/or physical in childhood and/ or adulthood) was significantly connected to greater psychological distress with the most common form of harassment being verbal. The researchers argue that lesbian and bisexual women continually endure cultural victimization, and the constant strain of living with homophobia and heterosexism (Neisen, 1993 as cited in Morris & Balsam, 2003; Swim, Pearson, & Johnston, 2007).

In another study that involved the assessment and treatment of a lesbian-identified survivor of multiple traumatic events (sexual abuse and childhood neglect), researchers found that victimization, because of sexual orientation and trauma, has psychological implications (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2013). The individual met the DSM-V criteria for PTSD, major depressive disorder, borderline personality disorder and substance dependence disorder. Although the research focuses on one individual, it highlights the potential vulnerability of sexual minority clients especially in contexts of poverty and community violence that undermine their safety and self-protection (Ford & Courtois, 2009; as cited in Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2013). The individual in the case study was subjected to childhood neglect, recurrent exposure to sexual abuse and continuous experiences of discrimination because of her sexual orientation. This led to negative internal working models of herself and others, issues of self-blame, self-punitive behaviour and social isolation (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2013).

Morrissey (2013) argues that because black lesbians are discursively positioned as 'un-African' and 'un-natural' in media coverage, it encourages this violent rape culture to occur together with the discrimination and disciplining of sexuality. She argues that the language displayed in newspaper articles, documentary or film excerpts, and reports play a powerful role and sometimes reinforce hierarchal, discriminatory views about women and their sexual orientation. Morrissey (2013) suggests that reports of sexual violence against lesbians should be reframed in terms of empowerment rather than victimization by making changes in discourse when reporting. This will transform the way in which we view these incidents and the way in which survivors view themselves. This emphasises the importance of

exploring media constructions of rape, gender and sexual orientation. This leads to the reports on sexual violence against lesbians in newspapers.

Newspaper reports on sexual violence against lesbians

The media has an important role to play in the sharing and reporting of public knowledge and in advocating for policy development. Media narratives could also play a role in how rape survivors recover. In addition, media reports have implications for how public opinions are formulated on certain topics and how events are perceived (Macnamara, 2005). Hames (2011) observes that there is a concern that the fundamental purpose of emphasising social, human, economic and political rights is lost to the media's preoccupation with selling stories and lives in the name of awareness raising. A substantial portion of research is dedicated to heterosexual rape and not specifically to sexual violence against black lesbians in South Africa. Additionally, a considerable amount of research has been done on rape and violence against women, but not particularly violence against (black) lesbian women.

As aforementioned, the issue of victimization can take psychological and physical forms which are to the detriment of the individuals involved (Morris & Balsam, 2003; Morrissey, 2013). Black homosexual women are especially at risk of perpetual victimization in media reports of sexual violence which often construct the issue as an individual or minority group problem instead of a social problem.

Boeshart (2014) conducted a content analysis on newspaper reports from 2009 to 2013 on sexually violent attacks and how the media portrays survivors of the attacks. She argues that media coverage documented an indifference to the lived realities of homosexual women in South Africa in favour of privileging political and social cohesion. The analysis revealed that reports about sexual violence against lesbians are especially misleading because as it asserts that incidents only happen in townships, which serves to further exclude and 'other' those residing in townships based on location. In addition, the media also implicitly and sometimes explicitly construct South Africa's black townships as dangerous (Boonzaier, in press; Boeshart, 2014). The media furthermore constructs black men primarily as perpetrators and the victims as a certain class of women (Boeshart, 2014; Hames, 2011).

In a similar vein, Van der Schyff (2015) conducted a comparative study that examined how newspaper articles report on rape and sexual violence against lesbians. She examined the media's representation of the issue of homophobic rape by comparing it to heterosexual reports and if and how selected South African newspapers reported corrective rape incidents

compared to reports on rape over a twelve-month period (2012-2013). The findings indicate that newspapers were seven times more likely to give preference to reports on heterosexual cases of rape than homosexual incidences of rape. With regard to salience, only one report of sexual violence against lesbians was situated in the domestic news component of the newspaper, whereas the remaining reports appeared in the opinion sections of newspapers. Therefore, the salience of newspaper reports on sexual violence against lesbians is undermined compared to the reports on rape (Van der Schyff, 2015).

The media indeed plays a powerful role in the way sexual violence against black lesbians is constructed. This study aims to fill the existing gaps in the literature by specifically assessing how incidences of sexual violence and the perpetrators and survivors thereof are portrayed in South African newspapers.

Aims and objectives

Aim

This research study aims to analyse media reporting on sexual violence against black lesbians in order to identify how victims and perpetrators of sexual violence are portrayed. Additionally, this research aims to identify how the construction of victims and perpetrators draw on existing stereotypes about rape and the potential discourses within media reports that may maintain or challenge the intersectional positions of black lesbian women.

Main Research Question

How is sexual violence against black lesbians represented in South African print (newspaper) media?

Sub-Questions

- How are victims and perpetrators of sexual violence portrayed in newspaper reports in South Africa?
- How do representations of victims and perpetrators draw on existing stereotypes about rape (e.g. victim blaming)?
- Are the discursive strategies within the media used to maintain or challenge discourses of race, class, gender and power?

Methodology

This research makes use of the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research is concerned with the production of meaning in an explorative way. It focuses on complexity; openness and detail in an attempt to make sense of the information that may surface from the data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, & Painter, 2006).

The influence of the media as a social institution is known to contribute to violence, sexual promiscuity and discrimination against women because of its role in informing public opinion and changing and influencing society (Macnamara, 2005). Discourses employed by the printed media do not only have an effect on the audience, but it also pervades power structures in society e.g. religious, cultural, political and economic institutions. This power is largely symbolic and persuasive (van Dijk, 1996). This paradigm is applicable to this study as it allows for the discourses of homophobic rape in the printed media to be explored in order to gather possible themes and implications such discourses.

Theoretical framework

The social constructionist approach holds the view that human experience and perception is influenced by society and that 'reality' is a product of this (Willig, 2008; Wilson & MacLean, 2011). Human experience is profoundly constructed by language and language should therefore be analysed (Terre Blanche et al., 2006). Consequently, discourse is an important component in the construction of knowledge and the perception of various social events. The social constructionist framework will therefore allow for the examination of the implications of newspaper reports on sexual violence against black lesbians by exploring the discursive constructions of the incidents. The 'turn to language' that refers to the discourse paradigm, is important because as humans we are social beings and a large component of our daily interactions with one another through language (Parker, 2005), and as we know, language does things. For example, discourse in society today may maintain or challenge degrading beliefs about human beings according to the many identities we possess, for example race, class and gender (Parker, 2005; van Dijk, 1996). It will therefore be beneficial to make use of this particular framework because of the focus on the 'reality' that newspapers construct in reports of sexual violence against black lesbians.

Intersectionality is regarded by many as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship (Davis, 2008). The intersectional feminist paradigm is distinctly concerned with issues of gender, heterosexism, patriarchy, misogyny and the influences of these issues on the lived realities of women (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 2008). This framework draws on the work of Kimberlè Crenshaw (1991) and was developed to acknowledge the

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various interlocking forms of oppression such as race, gender, sexual orientation and class that mainstream feminism overlooks. The theory was developed to challenge the supposed universality of the applicability of mainstream feminism that is considered to only represent the issues of white, middle class, heterosexual women. The focus of this research is black lesbian women and it would therefore be beneficial to make use of the feminist theoretical framework. The social and historical context is important to the understanding of development, why feminist frameworks are necessary and why they emerge. The South African context provides the perfect context for this type of analysis because of centuries of colonial rule and apartheid.

It is important to note that there are no particular guidelines to the application of feminist frameworks, however all frameworks rely on the foundation of women's subjugation, inequality and conducting research that aims to understand the unique experience of being a woman (Beetham & Demetriades, 2007; Parpart, Connelly, & Barriteau, 2000; & Terre Blanche, et al., 2006). The unique intersectional oppression that black lesbian women encounter would thus make the intersectional feminist agenda a valuable instrument as a theoretical framework. The dissecting of potentially detrimental discursive strategies in newspaper reports on sexual violence against black lesbians would further add to the feminist agenda of gender empowerment and equality.

Data collection

The newspaper articles were obtained through *SA Media* that is made available by the University of Cape Town's library website via the Sabinet Reference platform. *SA Media* is an electronic platform that has provided digitalised versions (in PDF format) of various South African newspaper publications since 1978. The platform contains a range of more than 3 million newspaper reports which makes data collection time-efficient and accessible.

Sampling procedure

This research utilised a purposive sampling method for the collection of archival data in the form of printed news articles. This use of this sampling method aided in the ease of accessibility of past and more recent reports on sexual violence against black lesbians.

The phrase "*corrective rape*" together with the term "*lesbians*" was added as search keywords (leaving the *exact word/phrase* option box checked). *SA Media* generated 130 newspaper articles from 25 publications. The publications that contributed the most to the

amount of articles were: *Cape Times* (19), *Star* (18), *Cape Argus* (11) and the *Mail & Guardian* (11). The publication years ranged from 2003 to 2017 (see Appendices A and B). The period entered into SA Media was January 1994 to June 2017 to determine if there were any articles published after apartheid; however, the platform only yielded articles from 2003 to 2017. In the data collection of the proposed research, only newspaper articles that document incidences of sexual violence against black lesbian women will be considered. This study has sourced articles from all 25 publications (from 2003 to 2017) to provide a comprehensive analysis of how newspaper reports have potentially changed overtime.

Data analysis

Thematic discourse analysis is derived from the social constructionist paradigm and is concerned with identifying themes within data by theorising language or discourse as constitutive of meaning with that meaning having social implications (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Various groups of people will either gain or lose from constructions of particular discourses, consequently power is always implicated.

In the case of this research, the aim of employing a form of discursive analysis is to deconstruct textual accounts of sexual violence against black lesbians that may be constructed in ways that portray certain images and ideas about what it means to be black, female and lesbian in South Africa. This will make it possible to take a critical, progressive and political stance to the truth claims made by newspaper reports and since issues of rape are centred on power and control, using this method of analysis will uncover this and the constructions of their intersectional identities (Burr, 1995). Discursive strategies within the media may describe survivors of sexual violence as 'victims' which in turn have implications for how affected individuals see themselves and might lead to feelings of disempowerment. This also has consequences for how the public are exposed to media formulate their ideas and opinions about sexual violence (van Dijk, 1996).

It is important to note that there is no standard guideline for conducting thematic discursive analysis and this form of analysis is fairly under-utilized. However, as a guide, the study by Taylor and Ussher (2001) was used in the analysis of newspaper reports. Themes were identified in newspaper articles; these themes were then grouped and examined for patterns, inconsistency and for the possible function of specific discourses (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Thereafter, themes were then re-examined by re-reading the articles to ensure that they were in fact themes.

Ethical Considerations

Since this research is archival in nature, and therefore does not deal with participants, obtaining an ethics request is was not necessary. The articles used for analysis are publically available through the distribution and purchasing of newspapers which indicate that there are no concerns around anonymity.

Reflexivity

Qualitative researchers acknowledge that their work is fundamentally subjective. Researchers therefore have to reflect on the research process by recognising their role in the construction thereof. This allows researchers to account for their own subjective factors that might have an impact on their work. This practice is called reflexivity (Terre Blanche, et al., 2006; Willig, 2008; & Wilson & MacLean, 2011) and it increases the integrity and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Finlay, 2002).

Reflexivity is linked to the researcher's role in the construction and interpretation of research. As a heterosexual woman of colour, from a working class background, pursuing post-graduate studies, I explicitly acknowledge that I bring my own subjectivity to the research process. In the case of gender-based violence against black lesbian women, I do acknowledge my privilege as heterosexual as well as the potential class and racial privilege and the impact it may have on the collection, selection and interpretation of this research (Finlay, 2002).

As the researcher, it is my role to remain honest and aware about my position throughout the research process. This research enables one to be more critical about the news media and how it influences perceptions, especially on issues of the gender-based violence and discrimination of black lesbians. Additionally, this research reinforces the importance of advocating for the rights of gender non-conforming individuals that many take for granted.

Analysis and Discussion

This study aims to answer how sexual violence against black lesbians is represented in the South African printed media. The study asks the following: 'How are victims and perpetrators portrayed in articles?', 'How do representations of victims and perpetrators draw on existing stereotypes about rape?', 'Are the discursive strategies within the media used to maintain or challenge discourses of race, class, gender and power?' Through Braun and Clarke's (2006) and Taylor and Ussher's (2001) guidelines for conducting a thematic

discourse analysis, the following themes emerged, namely: (1) *Discourses of sexual violence as justified*, (2) *(re)-victimisation and the absence of justice* and (3) *lesbian identities as a challenge to masculinity*.

1. Constructions of sexual violence as a ‘lesson’ and curative

This section explores how the discourses in newspapers have constructed sexual violence against black lesbians as justified.

Many articles reported sexual violence against black lesbians as a ‘lesson’. For example, the extracts below illustrate how constructions of homosexuality as deviant are perpetuated, making it appear as though sexual violence against black lesbians is deserved and justifiable. The director of the Luleki Sizwe organisation that fights for the rights of black lesbians in township areas had the following to say about the recurrence homophobic rape:

Some of the phrases uttered during attacks on lesbians include "I am teaching you a lesson" and "I am correcting you".

(“Lesbians still face constant attack in ekasi”, City Press, 26 June 2011)

A rape survivor, Millicent Gaika shares her experience of sexual violence and what the perpetrator said to her when he raped her:

The Gugulethu resident was repeatedly raped and assaulted a week ago by a man she had known for nearly 20 year-because she was a lesbian...He told her he would impregnate her to show her she was a woman, rape her to teach her a lesson, kill her and throw her body into a nearby river.

(Gugulethu woman speaks out about her rape ordeal, Cape Times, 9 April 2010)

It was around that time a male neighbour began taunting Lindi. "In the beginning I hardly noticed him," she says. And then came the warning. "You're not a man. One day I'm going to teach you a lesson", he said... He told her he had to do it to her because she was a lesbian.

(“There was nobody I could scream to...” Independent on Saturday, 9 April 2011.)

The above excerpts reinforce the idea that lesbians' who are distanced from the heteronormative 'order' need to be taught a "lesson" and be disciplined through rape by heterosexual men. It indicates that in order for heteronormativity to be maintained, discipline is used in order to keep women under the power of men (Morrissey, 2013). In this way, sexuality becomes something that can be regulated and justified by punitive or curative discourses. Homosexual women are constructed as requiring "correction" and 'fixing' for straying from the heterosexual norm.

The media is a powerful institution and people reading these articles may internalise these forms of discursive representations of black lesbian women who have been sexually violated. The influence of the media might not be confined to their audience, but is pervasive enough in that it infiltrates broader frameworks of society (van Dijk, 1996). The fact that these beliefs come from perpetrators highlight the fact that they think of themselves as justified teachers and regulators of the sexuality and gender of black lesbian women and that they are acting in their best interest. In this case the justification of violence is used as a system of regulation when the marginalised group is unquestionably necessary to the continued survival of those in power. By punishing women for their attempts to free themselves from subordinate roles they are continually reminded of their specific position in society (Moffett, 2006). The sexuality of black lesbians is also regulated by punitive and curative discourses.

Homophobic rape is sometimes accompanied by 'curative' or 'punitive' discourses (Mkhize, Bennett, Reddy & Moletsane, 2010). These discourses construct sexuality, and specifically lesbianism as a disease that can be cured. This is evident in textual constructions of sexual violence against black lesbians, such as in the two excerpts below:

Babalwa Mazingisi is employed by the society as a programme director for Creating an Enabling Environment. She said so-called corrective rapists told their victims "you dress like a man, but if you can't fight us off, it is a reminder that you are still a woman and we are going to cure you".

("The stain on our rainbow nation", Sunday Tribune, 22 May 2011)

To their neighbours, Thandeka and Xoliswa are siblings sharing a home in Khayelitsha-but the two women have used the sister act to hide their lesbian relationship since a brutal homophobic attack five years ago...They (men) used to

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shout swear words at us and say how we needed to be 'cured', as if being lesbian or gay was a disease.

(“Survival comes before pride as couple goes undercover”, Sunday Argus, 19 June 2011)

The discourses used in the above extracts construct sexual violence as pathological because of the construction of lesbianism as a “disease” and something that can be “cured”. The first extract perpetrators mention that lesbians appear masculine in their choice of attire, but if she is unable to defend herself from them, she is still a woman. This positions heterosexual men as the ‘solution’ to ‘fix’ lesbianism so that women can remain under their control.

Language shapes beliefs and has the ability to influence behaviours (UNAIDS, 2015). The terminology guidelines as stipulated by the United Nations Aids suggest that the use of the term “corrective rape” gives the impression that something needs to be fixed (UNAIDS, 2015). They suggest that “homophobic rape” is a more appropriate term. In newspaper articles, the use of terms such as “corrective rape”, “punitive rape” and “curative rape”, which are utilized in all newspaper articles and journals used for this study, draw on and reinforce punitive and curative discourses about sexuality. The repeated use of these terms constructs lesbians as pathological and unnatural which in turn reinforces notions of ‘othering’ and legitimises violence against black lesbians and the disciplining of their sexuality (Hames, 2011).

Public discourse should not perpetuate rape culture nor should it justify gendered and sexual violence. In 2013, FHM writers Max Barashenkov and Montle Moroosi were met with outrage for ridiculing sexual violence against lesbians on Facebook (Legg, 2013). In a status update Barashenkov wrote: “I propose correctional rape and sterilisation for any white person who twerk” (Legg, 2013, p.3). Moroosi then added: “I think rape can be quite fun if executed in a romantic manner. Like saying ‘I love you’ before slipping a roofie in her Earl Grey tea” (Legg, 2013, p.3). After being confronted by various gender rights groups and social media users, they were both suspended and told to issue public apologies for their comments. Barashenkov defended his comments by saying that he also experienced sexual violence as a result of his sexuality and was therefore entitled to joke about it (Germaner, 2013; Legg, 2013). The Commission on Gender Equality did not accept the apology because it did nothing but justify gendered and sexual violence (Germaner, 2013).

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The linguistic constructions of gender non-conforming groups, whether verbal or textual is an important tool in the fight for social justice. The sadistic, homophobic slur utilized by Barashenkov and Moroosi demonstrates the way in which hetero-patriarchy is used to disregard issues of discrimination and endorse violence, thereby increasing the vulnerability of already marginalised groups.

On 30th March 2011, a rare newspaper article entitled: 'I will find you and I will fix you' appeared in the Cape Times. The article offered a glimpse into the perspective of a perpetrator of homophobic rape. The article by Tanya Farber on the perspective of Siyanda, 51 years old, reveals discourses of the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity, and hetero-patriarchy. In the extract below Siyanda describes an incident where he rapes a lesbian woman which he claims changed her life for the better:

*'This moment I am going to show you something'. I locked the door. She was crying but I don't care about that. Today she has a boyfriend and a baby and I am the one who taught her that... "Once I have f***** them and they are scared of me, they'll stay inside and cook food and clean the house. I am giving those dads what they want – a girl who stays home"'*.

(‘I will find you and I will fix you’, Cape Times, 30 March 2011)

The perpetrator positions himself as a justified teacher of homosexual women's "broken" sexuality. He constructs that it is not 'feminine' lesbians that disturb him, but that he is particularly bothered by butch lesbians because he believes they must not act like men, but they ought to be cooking and cleaning. It seems to be of concern to him that butch lesbians are not conforming to traditional gender roles and as previously mentioned, they challenge homogenised notions of masculinity. By raping lesbian women the perpetrator is constructed as reinforcing that their subordination functions as a foundation for social order by upholding patriarchal ideologies and defending masculine culture and identity (van der Schyff, 2015).

This theme highlighted the concern of the discursive construction of sexual violence as a "lesson". This discourse was repeated across many articles as was the construction of homophobic rape as something that can be "cured". These discourses together with the continued use of the term "corrective rape" only reinforces public thought of homosexuality as an aberration to the heterosexual norm.

2. The lesbian identity as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity

This section explores how discourses in newspaper reports construct women's homosexuality as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity. There are two sub-themes in this section: (i) Conventional gender roles and the threat of lesbian identities and (ii) the connection between masculinity and nationalism.

(i) The lesbian identity as a threat to traditional gender norms

In current day South Africa, there a discourse of women empowerment and equality has become pervasive and has entered popular consciousness amongst the masses. Traditional gender norms are constantly influx and shifting; however, even with these progressive discourses, sexual and gendered violence against women still takes place in an effort to maintain the hetero-patriarchal order. The following extracts construct the lesbian sexuality as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity:

Noxolo Jelwana (pseudonym), a lesbian recounts the threat that the lesbian sexuality presents to men:

Before women didn't have a voice and could not work outside the home. Now they have a platform. Men once had all the power, now they feel challenged. The only thing left is their sexual identity and machismo. They see lesbian women as challenging that domination, and butch lesbian women are more of a threat than they can bear.

(The stain on our rainbow nation, Sunday Tribune, 22 May 2011)

Some men rape lesbians to police women's sexualities and bodies and to prove that women are not free to choose their sexual identities, especially if those identities threaten men's sense of self-importance and deny them their assumed right to determine how women live their lives.

(We must do more to embrace difference, Pretoria News, 15 February 2011)

Issues of masculine dominance are central to understanding the persistence of gendered and sexual violence against women. The above extracts construct the contemporary state of the blurred lines between one's sex and traditional gender roles. Consequently, this leads to the hegemonic masculinity as being threatened. A masculine identity is usually understood as a combination of appearances, qualities and behaviours socio-culturally decided on as being associated with males. Swarr (2012) argues that lesbians are perceived as being a threat to manhood and also sexually 'unavailable' to the men in their communities.

Butch lesbians, who display a more masculine identity, are therefore more at risk of being attacked as they defy homogenized notions of masculinity and heterosexuality (Mkhize et al., 2010). Butch lesbians embody masculine subjectivities that consequently position them as ‘macho’ men. Swarr (2012) argues that butch lesbians pose a threefold threat to heterosexuality (because of their relationships with women), gender norms (as a result of their expression of a more masculine identity) and to sex (by challenging expectations of a male body as a prerequisite for identifying as masculine). Butch lesbians are particularly a threat to men as their dress and behaviours are identified as conveying divergence from normative understandings of gender and sexual orientation. Lesbians expose the parametric vulnerabilities of manhood as successful masculinity depends on the control and subjugation of women to coerce them into conforming to gendered conventions of heterosexual conduct (Swarr, 2012) embedded in traditional gender roles (Morrissey, 2013). The two extracts below construct perpetrators as bothered by females displaying masculinity.

A homophobic rape survivor recounts what her attacker said to her:

“He said he wanted to show me that what I'm doing is wrong and I should stop acting like a man”

(He said he wanted to show me that what I'm doing is wrong and I should stop acting like a man, Cape Times, 11 August 2013)

A perpetrator expresses his discontent with lesbians who ‘act’ like men:

“I will leave a lesbian to her own life. She knows she is a girl and dresses like a girl. It is these ones who act like men, who come and share our drinks and smokes and dress like us, they are the ones I must catch. I say: ‘Come here so I can show you who on Earth you are’. After being with me they know who they are.

(‘I will find you and I will fix you’, Cape Times, 30 March 2011)

The above excerpts are also examples moments when the news reporting just reiterated what the issue was about and tended to quote what perpetrator said. Therefore, they are discursively giving perpetrators a voice, one that spews homophobic slur and misogyny instead of using the opportunity to highlight why they think so rigidly about sexuality and traditional gender roles.

(ii) The connection between masculinity and being ‘un-African’

Homosexuality is positioned in news reports as being “unAfrican” and as a deviation from an ‘authentic’ African identity.

Most people, including those in government, follow religious and traditional beliefs that condemn homosexuality as an aberration and unAfrican.

(Fleeing to the arms of a hypocritical saviour, Mail and Guardian, 14 March 2013)

Even without physical violence, black lesbians are marginalised... They are told they are unAfrican if they are not living a heterosexual lifestyle.

(A black cloud that continues to hang over the rainbow nation, Daily dispatch, 28 March 2007)

At the heart of sexual violence incidents against black lesbians is the intense desire to defend and reclaim an authentic South African identity that foregrounds strength, heterosexuality, and what are perceived to be traditional gender roles, that render the bodies of black lesbians powerless (Morrissey, 2013). Since heteronormativity and patriarchy is deeply embedded in South Africa’s sense of national identity, it becomes obvious that black South African lesbians are not included.

Many continue to claim that same-sex desire is un-African and that is instead a Western import. However, homosexuality can be traced before the arrival of colonisers and it was the colonisers who dictated which types of relations or sexuality was prohibited or permitted it by means of religious discourses (Epprecht, 2008; Morrissey, 2013; Ratele, 2014; Swarr, 2012). Same-sex relations amongst black people were permissible in southern Africa on condition that interactions remain discreet, concealed from public awareness (Epprecht, 2008). The depiction of homosexual identities as invisible may shed light on the negative attitudes toward black lesbians that has less to do with the inauthenticity of their identities and instead more to do with their wilful ‘abandoning’ of cultural norms and expectations of sexual discretion and invisibility (Morrissey, 2013). Newspaper reports did highlight that homosexuality is erroneously considered un-African; however articles did not challenge this notion by informing readers why it is not. This is essential in order to rectify myths about homosexuality which may change attitudes and decrease discrimination.

In 2009, the then minister for women, children and people with disabilities, Lulama Xingwana abruptly left an art exhibition that displayed the work of black lesbian artists (Van

Wyk, 2010). Xingwana cited her reason for leaving was because she found the work to be “immoral” and later said: “Our mandate is to promote social cohesion and nation building. I left the exhibition because it expressed the very opposite of this” (Van Wyk, 2010). The minister also makes it clear that she views lesbians as a hindrance toward nation building and solidity. Consequently, Xingwana imparts that there is no place in South Africa for gender-nonconforming individuals. Newspaper reports challenged this notion and condemned the harmful comments. This also conveys the message that South Africa privileges heterosexuality over other forms of sexuality. When we talk about the progressiveness of South Africa, it only refers to the constitution as the advancement does not exist beyond that.

Lulama Xingwana was in particular positions of power and used it to undermine the rights of gender-nonconforming groups. Consequently, this sends the message that sexual and physical violence against gender non-conforming individuals is permitted by those in power and that the lesbian identity does not fit into structure of South African nationalism.

This theme highlights the way in which the lesbian identity is constructed as a challenge to masculinity and ‘un-African’, especially the butch lesbian identity as a result of the discourses about them ‘acting’ like men. This is used to justify homophobic rape by ensuring that lesbian women remain under the control of men. Many lesbians report that after being sexually violated, they face secondary victimisation from health care professionals and the justice system.

3. (Re)Victimisation and the absence of justice

This section explores how newspapers report on justice system (police, law and health systems) and how black lesbians are face secondary victimisation. There are three sub-themes in this section: (i) re-victimisation by the justice system, (ii) the repeated brutal nature of reports and (iii) the turn to human rights and activist discourses in reports about sexual violence.

(i) Discourses of secondary victimisation by the justice systems

The media plays a crucial role in informing the public about the challenges faced by black lesbians. Although the agenda may be bringing to light the various difficulties, there may be the risk of further marginalisation and overemphasis of vulnerability instead of agency and empowerment orientated discourses. In the extract below, the justice system fails to acknowledge the harm that black lesbians face:

RUNNING HEAD: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK LESBIANS

“There is no hard evidence to suggest this is a corrective rape and we cannot go on speculation. But even if it is, there is nothing in South African criminal law that would allow us to charge someone with corrective rape,” he said.

(Corrective rape: A horrific crime fed by silence and taboo, Mail & Guardian, 12 May 2011).

The above extract indicates the blatant denial of the acknowledgement of sexual violence against black lesbians by the lack of criminal charge as a result of ‘no hard evidence’. In the Eudy Simelane case, the judge found that her sexual orientation had ‘no significance in her killing’ even though perpetrators knew her and were well aware of her sexual orientation (Mkhize et al., 2010; Wheal, 2012). Muholi (2004) argues that many homosexual women are discriminated against by someone they know in their community, ‘friends’ or family members which further reinforces the fear felt by women who find themselves confined by the hetero-patriarchal societal structures. Reports also highlight the less than punitive sentences given to perpetrators:

Andile Ngcoza was subsequently arrested for the rape of and attack on Millicent. He was released on bail of R500.

(“A cowardly crime against lesbians”, City Press, 16 January 2011)

Thandeka reported the case to the police and the attackers were arrested, much to the couple’s relief. But a few days later, they spotted the men back on the street, out on bail. “It felt like a nightmare they attacked us, sent my girlfriend to the hospital and were now walking free to attack us again. We realised we couldn’t rely on the police for protection and decided to move,” says Thandeka.

(“Survival comes before pride as couple goes undercover”, Sunday Argus, 19 June 2011)

“When you are raped you have a lot of evidence on your body. But when we try and report these crimes nothing happens, and then you see the boys who raped you walking free on the street.”

(Macho culture ‘causing tide of violence against lesbians’, The Weekend Post, 14 March, 2009)

RUNNING HEAD: SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST BLACK LESBIANS

Many extracts convey that survivors and murdered women know the attacker(s) from their residing areas and in some cases, they may also be relatives. According to the extracts, when these perpetrators are reported to the police they often get less than punitive sentences such as the case above where attackers were subsequently released on bail. When newspapers report this they are not only demonstrating that the justice system upholds the rape culture in South Africa, but they are also refusing to acknowledge the harm caused by sexual violence against lesbians (Hames, 2001; Morrissey, 2013). This silences their violence as well as the horrible effects that it has on the lives of black lesbians, not to mention the risk of sexually transmitted diseases, unwanted pregnancy and murder. Perpetrators are therefore made to appear less accountable for their actions which may in turn cause fear and also make survivors more ashamed to report rape and harassment. Once more, this sends the message that violence and discrimination against gender non-conforming women is acceptable. Newspapers also raise issues of reporting rape to the police, where in many cases; it will not be taken seriously:

Mzimela also said police did not take their cases seriously and often "laughed" until they were forced to leave the police station.

(“Corrective gay rape rife in EC, says report”, Daily Dispatch, 6 December 2011)

Lesbians and transgender men live in perpetual fear of verbal insults, physical abuse and sexual violence. And what is worse, they feel they have no one to turn to – not even the police. In fact, almost without exception lesbians and transgender men had no trust in the police, at whose hands they often face incompetence or ridicule.

(“Beyond corrective rape”, Witness, 12 December 2011)

In many instances, interviewees said, police did not respond appropriately when interviewees sought justice, or even compounded the initial abuse. Virtually all of those interviewed who tried to report physical or sexual violence to the police faced ridicule, harassment, and secondary victimisation by police personnel.

(“Breaking down the walls of discrimination”, Cape Times, 20 December 2011)

This may lead to survivors and witnesses of sexual violence being even more reluctant to report incidents. Gender-based violence is constructed through a binary lens in the above extracts, and those who fall on the periphery of that lens are unfortunately not having their cases appropriately tended to with urgency or professionalism. This portrays their dignity as

elusive, leaving the heteronormative status quo intact. When police refuse to acknowledge the harm faced by black lesbian women it ties into the exacerbation of rape culture and victimisation and potentially, re-victimisation (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2013). Reports also repeat the same statistics of homophobic rape across many articles:

In the past 10 years in South Africa, 31 lesbians have been reported killed as the result of corrective rape, she said. A charity called Luleki Sizwe estimates that 10 lesbians are raped or gang raped per week in Cape Town alone.

(LGBTI visibility means backlash, The New Age, 15 September 2014)

Excerpts such as the ones above are utilized and repeatedly sensationalised in newspaper reports regarding the rape of lesbians to highlight that they are not safe in South Africa. This highlights the strategies used by the media to provoke interest from the public, but at the expense of rendering lesbians as powerless subjects. This indicates that sexual violence against lesbians is positioned as something that will inevitably happen. It is also concerning that there is no specific information kept regarding hate crimes making it difficult to have a precise indication of how often these offences are committed (Morrissey, 2013; van der Schyff, 2015; Wheal, 2012). This is because newspapers discursively emphasise the incompetence of the police system and the injustice of the court system. A series of article titles in this study's data similarly reiterate that the safety of black lesbians in South Africa is compromised:

- LGBTI visibility means backlash, lesbians targets of rape war
- Lesbians still face constant attack in ekasi
- Lucky to be alive
- The invisible women
- Being lesbian in South Africa could get you killed

These newspaper titles serve to further marginalise black lesbians and instil fear without considering how it might affect their agency. This should call into question the agenda of journalists and also demonstrates that there is a need for them to be cognisant of how the media could be used as a tool of empowerment and activism that values the lived experiences of black lesbians. This could be accomplished by expressing keen interest in their subjectivity and how they challenge victimisation. Although the intention of journalists'

agenda may have been raising awareness about the challenges faced by marginalised groups, the discursive practices employed to do so may result in these inequalities being maintained and may cause further marginalisation (Hames, 2011; Morrissey, 2013).

Articles also emphasise the concern of the poor implementation of South Africa's progressive constitution 23 years into democracy which forbids discrimination of any kind as demonstrated by the following extracts:

Such frustration is minor compared to the so-called "corrective" rape, murder, insults and beatings that South African lesbians have frequently suffered, despite the widely admired, post-apartheid constitution which was the first in the world to ban discrimination based on sexual orientation.

(SA's lesbian soccer players in battles for far more than ball, Weekend Post, 8 May 2010)

In South Africa, there is the long-standing history of using overt violence to control the 'other' (Mkhize et al., 2010; Moffett, 2006). Perpetrators may also hold the belief that by resorting to sexual violence they are participants of a socially and culturally approved endeavour to oppress women and non-conforming individuals (Moffett, 2006). This type of hierarchical reasoning does not simply dissipate as a result of democracy (Moffett, 2006), especially if violence is perhaps the most instructive marker of history and the present (Judge, 2013)

(ii) The longstanding dehumanisation of black African bodies

The emphasis on the nature of the brutality in reporting sexual violence against lesbians was echoed across many newspaper articles:

Lodged between two walls-a house and a perimeter wall-is the spot where 26-year-old lesbian Duduzile was found... When her body was found, there was no bleeding, no bruises on the body, no strangulation marks around the neck and no signs of a struggle at the scene. Her killers had shoved a toilet brush up her vagina.

(Politician decries Duduzile's death, Star, 9 July 2013)

Nkosazana was raped and beaten before her lifeless body was left to hang on barbed wire. Her only “crime” was being a lesbian...a black lesbian.

(Where’s the snake, Sunday Tribune, 11 December 2011)

The above extracts construct sexual violence against lesbians as worth mentioning when these kinds of gruesome details are made available for public consumption. Newspapers demonstrate how the mainstream media has desensitised the public to violence. Instead of informing the audience of *how* and *why* this level violence continues to persist, the violence and brutality is normalised. The gruesome representations of the murders and sexual violence against black lesbians are allowing that they are positioned in inhumane ways, merely reducing them to *how* they were murdered and failing to acknowledge their lived realities. This serves to dehumanise black bodies and ties into how the colonial gaze has reduced African female bodies to being unworthy of dignity or humanity (Boonzaier, in press; Lewis, 2011).

Discourses of colonialism are therefore remaining deeply embedded in the current constructions of black African bodies as grotesque, uncivilised and hypersexual. By featuring of horrific details about *how* the murder of black lesbians occurred in news reports demonstrate how colonial discourses of black femininity coupled with the disregard for their lived experience are overemphasised (Boonzaier, in press; Msimang, 2014). It is also concerning that throughout the sample of articles in this study, there are no attempts to provide alternative narratives of empowerment for survivors of sexual violence. It is imperative to remain critical of the discursive strategies employed by the media that illustrate the ferocious rape and murders of black lesbian women. We should also continually question the complicity of human rights groups, feminist activists and journalists (Hames, 2011; Judge, 2013).

According to Gibson-Graham (2001 as cited in Matebeni, 2015), there are various approaches that the media can utilize to challenge victimisation discourses. He argues that reporters can employ speech techniques in ways that show that survivors refuse to recognise themselves as disempowered victims. This can be achieved by demeaning the power of the perpetrator with the reconstruction of the effects that the rape had on individuals. Furthermore, these inhumane subject positions might serve to reinforce pathological subjectivities of black lesbians. Consequently, these constructions used by the media provide the perfect conditions that maintain the cycle of violence against women and gender non-conforming individuals. In cases where lesbians have survived homophobic rape, the media

should be cognisant of portraying incidents as irrevocable and permanent in terms of the effects on the person (Matebeni, 2015). Despite the focus on black lesbians as victims, there are human rights and activist discourses that are present in reports of sexual violence against black lesbians.

Despite the perpetuation of previous discourses by previous discourses, newspaper reports also seem to advocate for action from the South African government to prevent hate crimes:

We have to speak out in our homes and communities. And we have to demand that our government takes urgent action both at home and abroad to live up to its constitutional commitments.

(We must do more to embrace difference, Pretoria news, 15 February 2011)

The protesters held aloft posters bearing messages such as... 'One Dead Lesbian is one 2 many' ...The protesters raised the issue of inadequate funding and resources for forensic DNA testing, called for bail to be refused when arrests in such cases were made, and for hate and prejudice to be investigated as the motives behind these crimes.

(Protesters slam government for its silence on hate crimes, Cape Argus, 3 May 2011)

The issue of violence against gender-non conforming individual is appropriately being discursively positioned as “urgent” and there is the concern with fulfilling constitutional responsibilities. As a result, this condemns the current situation and advocates for more attention to issues concerning gender non-conforming women of colour. Newspapers construct the protesters as rightfully collectively engaging for issues neglected by the justice system. This too conveys that there is active resistance towards the attacks.

The headlines in newspaper reports also effectively construct the serious implications of violence against gender non-conforming individual as well as the efforts made to eradicate and challenge sadism:

- Charity takes steps to stomp out homophobic crime
- Condemn all types of hate crimes
- Justice for Zoliswa

- Lesbians to attend talk at parliament
- Make sexual minorities mainstream
- We must do more to embrace difference

The way newspapers discursively position survivors and incidents of homophobic rape could either maintain or challenge their positions. The above extracts and headlines indicate that there are attempts made by newspapers to provide alternative constructions of sexual violence against lesbians.

This theme emphasises the discursive construction of the lack of justice and punishment for the sexually violent crimes committed against black lesbians. Consequently, this may cause reluctance to report such incidences as police may be complicit in secondary victimisation. Some newspapers also seem to discursively advocate for the rights and safety of lesbians to be protected.

Summary and Conclusion

Contemporary issues of violence against women in South Africa are the product of the violent history of colonialism and apartheid and the effects remain apparent. This research aimed to explore how sexual violence against black lesbians is represented in the South African printed media. The findings from this study indicate that from the period of 1994 and 2017 newspaper articles portrayed sexual violence against black lesbians in various ways. Three themes emerged from the analysis namely: (1) Constructions of sexual violence as a 'lesson' and curative, (2) lesbian identities as a challenge to hegemonic masculinity and (3) (re)victimisation and the absence of justice

The role of the media is to inform the public about pertinent issues such as sexual violence. There is the risk that the discursive constructions used in newspapers may contribute to the cycle of gender-based violence rather than provide solutions to combat it. This was found in reports of sexual violence against lesbians. News reports' constructions of sexual violence against lesbians as "corrective" reinforces the belief that homosexuality is deviant and needs to be "cured" or "fixed". The same can be said about the discursive construction of sexual violence as a "lesson" employed by perpetrators in some of this study's news reports. Newspapers also highlighted the incompetence of the South African justice system by showing the less than punitive sentences given to perpetrators and the

incompetence of the police. This discourse of an inadequate justice system might have served to reinforce ideas that black lesbians are not safe in South Africa.

While placing attention on pertinent issues of discrimination and prejudice faced by black lesbian women reports simultaneously rendered them powerless and focussed on the gruesome details of rape and murder. These discourses serve to dehumanise and sensationalise the harm done to black female bodies that can be located within a discourse of colonialism. This does nothing to challenge the oppressions faced by gender non-conforming individuals but reinforces their subjugation. Some newspaper reports challenged the discrimination that accompanies the South African black lesbian identity. Newspaper reports highlighted and condemned harmful public discourses about sexuality and sexual violence by various South African in prominent positions. Although newspaper articles the erroneous belief that homosexuality is un-African, it did not challenge why it is not. Human rights and activist discourses present in reports seem promising is a successful step forward in reframing victim roles.

This study advocates that the media be held accountable when unethically reporting issues of gendered and sexual violence against women that maintain the hetero-patriarchal status quo instead of challenging patriarchy, gender roles and heteronormativity. Perhaps the power can be shifted from the perpetrators and used for activism instead. It is important that the media be conscious of how they frame and portray the identities of gender non-conforming individuals. There should never be questions around what the agenda of reports are, it should be exceptionally clear. More alternative representations are needed as it can empower and not further render the agency and identities of black lesbians as invisible.

For future research, this study suggests that media representations of sexual violence against lesbians to be strengthened by with the use of triangulation. This could be achieved by perhaps including focus groups of a representative sample of the South African population in order obtain more insight into the public perceptions of newspaper reports.

A first and perhaps crucial step is being aware of the language used in newspapers by journalists and various activists and organisations. Activism and human rights discourses have the ability to emphasise the implications of homophobic rape of lesbians that can be used as an important tool of social justice. As previously mentioned, in addition to these discourses, journalists should also refrain from victimising black lesbians as this can cause further marginalisation. They could achieve this by being cognisant of harmful effects of discourses around masculinity, sexuality and stereotypical gender roles and accentuating how survivors

challenge them. When these steps are taken there will never be ambiguity around the agenda of media constructions of sexual violence against black lesbians.

This study demonstrates that it is time to change the conversations about gendered and sexual violence in South Africa. This may mean that as South Africans, we have a responsibility to challenge harmful commentary and dialogue that maintains gendered and sexual violence against women, rape culture and the stigmatisation of sexual orientation instead of remaining silent. This may be in the form of media representations or everyday conversations. It may also mean that we condemn those in power who make such comments about marginalised groups, but contradictorily maintain certain positions in the country that require that they uphold the constitution and lead by example. This may also mean that we constantly need to be open to challenge ideas about what a “real man” should look like, the same applies to women. The issue of sexual and gendered violence against black lesbian women is a human rights issue that concerns men and women. This study emphasises the importance of protecting the rights and safety of marginalised gender non-conforming women of colour.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Publication	Number of articles
1. CAPE TIMES	19
2. STAR	18
3. CAPE ARGUS	11
4. MAIL AND GUARDIAN	11
5. CITY PRESS	6
6. SUNDAY INDEPENDENT	6
7. SUNDAY TIMES	6
8. CITIZEN	5
9. PRETORIA NEWS	5
10. SATURDAY STAR	4
11. THE NEW AGE	4
12. WITNESS	4
13. DAILY NEWS	3
14. SERVAMUS	3
15. SUNDAY ARGUS	3
16. SUNDAY TRIBUNE	3
17. THE HERALD(EP HERALD)	3
18. THE TIMES	3
19. WEEKEND POST	3
20. BUSINESS DAY	2
21. DAILY DISPATCH	2
22. INDEPENDENT ON SATURDAY	2
23. SATURDAY ARGUS	2
24. SATURDAY DISPATCH	1
25. THE WEEKENDER	1

Appendix B

Publication Year	Number of articles
1. 2011	60
2. 2013	22
3. 2010	13
4. 2012	10
5. 2014	8
6. 2009	5
7. 2016	4
8. 2007	3
9. 2003	2
10. 2017	2
11. 2015	1