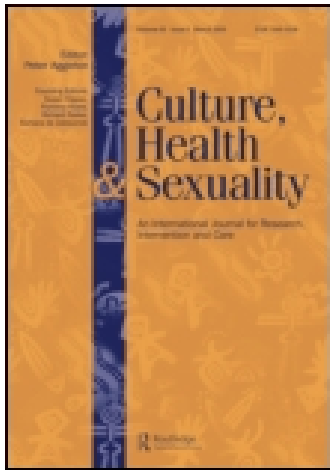


This article was downloaded by: [University of Rhodes]

On: 09 October 2014, At: 03:29

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tchs20>

Representations of the subject 'woman' and the politics of abortion: an analysis of South African newspaper articles from 1978 to 2005

Catriona Ida Macleod^a & Tracey Feltham-King^a

^a Department of Psychology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

Published online: 23 May 2012.

To cite this article: Catriona Ida Macleod & Tracey Feltham-King (2012) Representations of the subject 'woman' and the politics of abortion: an analysis of South African newspaper articles from 1978 to 2005, *Culture, Health & Sexuality: An International Journal for Research, Intervention and Care*, 14:7, 737-752, DOI: [10.1080/13691058.2012.685760](https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2012.685760)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2012.685760>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Taylor & Francis makes every effort to ensure the accuracy of all the information (the "Content") contained in the publications on our platform. However, Taylor & Francis, our agents, and our licensors make no representations or warranties whatsoever as to the accuracy, completeness, or suitability for any purpose of the Content. Any opinions and views expressed in this publication are the opinions and views of the authors, and are not the views of or endorsed by Taylor & Francis. The accuracy of the Content should not be relied upon and should be independently verified with primary sources of information. Taylor and Francis shall not be liable for any losses, actions, claims, proceedings, demands, costs, expenses, damages, and other liabilities whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with, in relation to or arising out of the use of the Content.

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Terms &

Conditions of access and use can be found at <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

Representations of the subject ‘woman’ and the politics of abortion: an analysis of South African newspaper articles from 1978 to 2005

Catriona Ida Macleod* and Tracey Feltham-King

Department of Psychology, Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa

(Received 18 November 2011; final version received 12 April 2012)

A key element in cultural and gender power relations surrounding abortion is how women who undergo an abortion are represented in public talk. We analyse how women were named and positioned, and the attendant constructions of abortion, in South African newspaper articles on abortion from 1978 to 2005, a period during which there were radical political and legislative shifts. The name ‘woman’ was the most frequently used (70% of articles) followed by ‘girl/teenager/child’ (25%), ‘mother’ (25%), ‘patient’ (11%) and ‘minor’ (6%). The subject positionings enabled by these names were dynamic and complex and were interwoven with the localised, historical politics of abortion. The ‘innocent mother’ and the bifurcated ‘patient’ (woman/foetus) positionings were invoked in earlier epochs to promote abortion under medical conditions. The ‘dangerous mother’ and woman as ‘patient’ positionings were used more frequently under liberal abortion legislation to oppose and to advocate for abortion, respectively. The positioning of the ‘girl/teenager/child’ as dependent and vulnerable was used in contradictory ways, both to oppose abortion and to argue for a liberalisation of restrictive legislation, depending on the attendant construction of abortion. The neutral naming of ‘woman’ was, at times, linked to the liberal imaginary of ‘choice’.

Keywords: abortion; media; representations; South Africa

Introduction

The politics of abortion may be defined as the configuration of cultural and gendered power relations that discussions, practices and legislation with respect to abortion bring to the fore. As such, the politics of abortion has a long and complicated history. Abortion has been constructed in multiple ways, depending on the location and time in which the debate is occurring. For example, a key contestation in the Western world, which emerged in the late-1960s, has been between the ‘pro-choice’ and ‘pro-life’ positions (Luker 1985). However, recently there have been changes in the terms of this contestation. In particular, arguments for the restriction of abortion have been justified through appeal to gender-based rather than foetal-focused arguments (Siegel 2007), and the term post-abortion syndrome (PAS) has been utilised to describe abortion as fundamentally traumatic (Hopkins, Reicher, and Saleem 1996).

Currently, much abortion activism is conducted under the rubric of ‘human rights’, with an emphasis on people having ‘the right to control their own bodies, their sexuality and their reproductive capacity’ (Klugman and Budlender 2001, x). In developing

*Corresponding author. Email: c.macleod@ru.ac.za

countries, abortion has been constructed by health agencies as a key public health issue because of high maternal mortality rates (World Health Organisation 2007). In some post-Soviet countries, the term ‘abortion culture’ refers to abortion being seen as ‘a “normal” way of dealing with medical and socioeconomic hardships in personal and family life’ (Karpov and Kaumläriäinen 2005, 13), although in countries like Poland the criminalisation of abortion has severely restricted access (Girard and Nowicka 2002).

Fundamental to the politics of abortion is the manner in which women who undergo a termination of pregnancy are represented (Smyth 2002). For example, within the ‘choice’ rhetoric, women are depicted as rational and autonomous beings, able to exercise agency in decision-making regarding the outcome of a pregnancy. The ‘pro-life’ discourse, on the other hand, allows space for women to be seen as murderers. Within the narrative of PAS, women are positioned as victims in need of protection and care (Lee 2002).

In this paper, we unpack the historical change in how women have been represented in relation to abortion in South African newspapers by analysing how these women are named and discursively positioned in articles on abortion and the attendant constructions and politics of abortion. South Africa provides a particularly pertinent space for this kind of study, owing to substantial shifts in the politics of abortion over the last decades. We have chosen newspapers as the source of data as the media plays a central role in framing public discussion on abortion (Rohlinger 2006) and in reproducing and defining women as subjects of a particular kind (Rakow and Wackwitz 2004).

We begin by briefly outlining the theoretical tenets underpinning our understanding of naming and positioning the subject. We then discuss changes in abortion legislation in South Africa and present the methodology used, a mixed-method content and discursive positioning analysis.

Naming and positioning the subject

The act of naming a subject is not neutral. How the subject, ‘woman’, is named emphasises certain features of the woman at the expense of others. Names reveal particular assumptions about the subject whilst simultaneously concealing others (Butler 1999). These names (e.g. ‘mother’) indicate to us particular characteristics of the subject by drawing attention to certain aspects (e.g. caring relationship with a child) whilst foreclosing or delimiting other aspects of that subject-hood (e.g. wage-earner or professional).

The act of naming does not, however, fix the subject. Names do not imply unitary or invariant subject positions. For example, the subject ‘mother’ may be conceptualised in many contradictory ways, including as self-sacrificing and nurturing and as responsible for a range of social ills due to the manner in which she rears her children (Burman 2008). Naming thus produces delimited subject positions, which nevertheless may change over time or across different sites.

Creating subject positions through naming in text is a practice of representation that assists in providing socially recognised subject locations that people may occupy or be ascribed. The practice of naming and positioning the subject is a social process undertaken by collectives as well as individuals that requires the named person to take up (or alternatively resist) particular subject positions (Davies and Harré 1999). By being positioned, subjects are placed in certain relations with one another, as for example the ‘mother’ implies child’ and ‘doctor’ implies ‘patient’.

These historically- and context-specific ways of talking that designate subject positions for people to occupy, draw on familiar story-lines or sets of conventional

expectations (Davies and Harré 1999). For example, the naming of the doctor and patient draws on certain expectations around, and creates certain subject positions concerning, how each should act and speak (Tan and Moghaddam 1999). The naming of the doctor serves to position such a person as having legitimate authority and expertise to speak on the patient's illness: to diagnose, to treat and to prescribe medicine. The naming of the patient creates a subject position from which a person may narrate symptoms but may only guess about the illness. If the patient makes a diagnosis and the doctor disagrees, then the patient has exceeded the boundary of what is allowed in the patient position (Phillips and Jörgenson 2002).

Background: abortion legislation in South Africa

In 1975 the Apartheid regime adopted the Abortion and Sterilization Act (1975). Under this Act, abortion was legal under very restrictive circumstances (serious risk to the woman's life, or mental or physical health; risk of foetal mental or physical defect; pregnancy resulting from rape, incest or sexual intercourse with a 'mentally defective' female). This legislation formed part of the Apartheid state's attempts to 'buttress racist heteropatriarchal apartheid culture' (Klausen 2010, 39), which sought to regulate reproductive sexuality through, *inter alia*, prohibiting inter-racial sex, promoting motherhood for white women (Klausen 2010) and simultaneously restricting population growth amongst blacks through extensive contraceptive promotion and, at times, enforcement (Klugman 1990). Although the legislation rested on anxieties concerning premarital (hetero)sexual activity amongst white women (Klausen 2010), white women received the vast majority of the just over 1000 abortions performed per year owing to the stringent procedures required to access a legal abortion (Cope 1993).

With the transition to democracy, and an increased emphasis on gender issues, civil society and the new political leadership mobilised in support of a revision of abortion legislation. Although most health and human rights activists argued for a liberalisation of legislation based on a combination of women's rights and public health arguments, some still referred to population control and the rights of doctors to decide when an abortion should be performed (Klugman and Varkey 2001). Soon after the first democratic elections of 1994, the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy (CTOP) Act (1996) was passed. Abortion may now be legally performed upon request during the first 12 weeks of pregnancy. Thereafter, abortions may be performed under certain conditions, including if the pregnancy will affect the women's social and economic status. Minors do not require parental consent to request an abortion, although they must be advised by a health service provider to consult a trusted adult. Since implementation in 1997 to the end of 2010, over 1 million legal terminations of pregnancy have been performed (Health Systems Trust 2011).

As would be expected, the introduction of the CTOP Act has not been without controversy. A pro-life alliance, headed by the Christian Lawyers' Association (CLA), has taken legal action on three occasions with regard to this Act, firstly, arguing that the CTOP Act was inconsistent with the Constitution, secondly, challenging the clause specifying that minors do not need parental consent for an abortion and, thirdly, contending that insufficient consultation was engaged in when an amendment seeking to extend services was introduced. In the first two cases the court found for the defendant and upheld the Act and the particular clause. In the third case, the government was instructed to engage in further public participation as required by the Constitution. The amendment, which came into effect in 2008 after public participation was effected, means that registered nurses

as well as midwives may perform terminations of pregnancy up to the 12th week of pregnancy (Harries 2009).

Methods

In this paper we focus on how women presenting for abortion are named and positioned in South African newspapers in the period 1978 to 2005. Specifically we ask the questions, 'What names and associated subject positionings are used to represent women considering and presenting for abortion?' 'How have these namings and subject positionings changed over time?' and 'What constructions of, and political positions regarding, abortion do these namings and subject positions draw on and allow?'

To answer these questions, we used a combination of content analysis and discursive positioning analysis. Content analysis is a widely used methodology that enables the transformation of verbal documents into quantitative data (Neuendorf 2002). The content analytic aspect allowed us to reveal patterns of naming and to track the changes in how women were named over time. Statistical analysis of these patterns consisted of frequency counts converted to percentages.

This was supplemented by a discursive positioning analysis (Davies and Harré 1999) to allow for qualitative analysis of the positionings that such naming allows and for qualitative analysis of changes in the positionings over time. The discursive positioning analysis drew on Parker's (1990) definition of discourse as a coherent system of statements that contains subjects of a particular kind. This analysis requires the researchers to ask how the woman is interactively positioned as a subject within the text of the article (Van Langenhove and Harré 1999).

Data were collected from the South African Media Archives located at the University of the Free State (<http://www.samedia.uovs.ac.za>). This archive consists of more than three million newspaper reports, magazine and journal articles as well as periodicals. The sampling frame was delimited by using the Media Monitoring Project definition of 'newspaper': printed in a recognisable newsprint format, published daily or weekly by independent publishing houses and easily available at newsagents. To fulfil the criterion of comprehensiveness, only those newspapers that had published at least 30 articles on abortion over a 28-year period were included. This resulted in a sampling frame of 2972 articles, written in English and Afrikaans, appearing in 25 publications (*Beeld, Die Burger, Business Day, Cape Argus, Cape Times, Citizen, City Press, Daily Dispatch, Daily News, The Herald, Hoofstad, Pretoria News, Rand Daily Mail, Rapport, Saturday Star, Sowetan, Star, Sunday Independent, Sunday Times, Sunday Tribune, Vaderland, Volksblad, Weekend Argus, Mail & Guardian* (formerly *The Weekly Mail*) and *Witness*). African language articles are not part of the archive and therefore not included in the sample, although some of the newspapers featured (e.g. *City Press* and *Sowetan*) have a mainly black readership. In addition, few African language newspapers exist, with only one existing over the period studied in this research.

Media scholars have highlighted the changes that the media has undergone over the last 40 years. Under Apartheid, the media were tightly controlled by the National Party government, which used the states of emergency, 'warnings' to newspapers and the Bureau of Information to restrict press freedom (Tomaselli and Louw 1989). Despite an opening up of the media after the transition to democracy, difficulties in terms of how women are represented and portrayed have been noted. Women are often absent or portrayed in simplistic ways (Rabe 2002) and they are less likely be interviewed and asked for an opinion than men (Lowe-Morna 2006). For example, Global Media Monitoring Project (2005)

revealed that women were the focus or subjects of news stories for less than a quarter (23%) of all news stories published in South Africa. As official spokespeople they constituted 16% of the overall total and as expert commentators they comprised 20% of the total.

The time frame 1978 to 2005 was divided into four-year clusters for ease of analysis. These even-sized clusters or epochs conveniently represent particular historical periods, as illustrated in Table 1.

The articles analysed were not evenly distributed over the 28-year period, with some epochs seeing little coverage and others substantial coverage. Table 2 presents the percentage of articles in the total frame appearing in each epoch.

Almost half the number of articles on abortion over the 28-year period appeared in Epoch 5, during which time the CTOP Act was initially debated and then passed. Skerjdal (2000) argues that the abortion debate in South Africa was read as a signifier of change from the Apartheid past to the democratic future and thus attracted significant attention. In addition, activists who promoted the new legislation actively engaged with the media (Klugman and Varkey 2001).

All articles were placed on a grid stratified by publication and epoch. A random sample of 10% of the total articles was taken from each cell of the grid. The numbers within each cell had to be rounded up or down within a range of 10 units so as to extract complete articles. A total of 300 articles were used for the analysis.

The 'naming categories' were decided upon after a thorough joint reading of the data set. Five naming categories emerged in this process: 'girl/teenager/child', 'mother', 'patient', 'woman' and 'minor'. The composite 'girl/teenager/child' naming category was decided upon as these terms were frequently used in conjunction (e.g. teenage girl) and each implies a developmental status. The name 'minor' was not included in this category, owing to its legal, rather than developmental, meaning. Articles were then analysed for the presence or absence of each of the naming categories.

Initially, categorisations that included descriptors (for example, 'the black woman') were anticipated. However, the categorisation of articles in terms of descriptors of differentiation was complicated by the fact that a range of descriptors, such as 'poor', 'wealthy', 'rural', 'urban', 'disadvantaged' 'less affluent', 'white', 'black', 'non-white' and 'African' were often used. These race, class and location descriptors were, for the most part, attached to the name woman, rather than 'girl', 'teenager', 'mother' or 'patient', and are thus discussed briefly in the results section in relation to the name 'woman' only. We acknowledge the central role that race and the attendant disadvantages have played in

Table 1. Description of epochs.

Epoch	Years	Description
One	1978–1981	Implementation of the Abortion and Sterilization Act of 1976
Two	1982–1985	Apartheid era; State of Emergency in 1985
Three	1986–1989	Apartheid era; state repression
Four	1990–1993	Transition to democracy
Five	1994–1997	The first democratic elections; adoption of a Constitution with an entrenched Bill of Rights; passing of CTOP Act
Six	1998–2001	Period after the implementation of the CTOP Act; court challenge to CTOP Act
Seven	2002–2005	Amendment to the CTOP Act proposed; Court challenge regarding minors

Table 2. Percentages of articles in each epoch.

Epoch	Percentage of articles
One (1978–1981)	13.0
Two (1982–1985)	5.6
Three (1986–1989)	3.0
Four (1990–1993)	6.6
Five (1994–1997)	46.8
Six (1998–2001)	13.0
Seven (2002–2005)	12.0
Total	100

sexual and reproductive politics in South Africa, and the construction of women along axes of differentiation (race, class and location) in the newspaper articles used in this study will be the subject of a different paper.

The coding of each newspaper article was effected by two researchers. Initially correspondence in the two sets of coding was 89.7%. After closer inspection and discussion, 100% consensus was reached.

Naming categories

Names were used in 80% of articles across all epochs. In some cases a single naming category and in others a combination of naming categories, were used. These are illustrated in Table 3.

In 20% of the articles, women are not referred to directly by means of a name. Abortion is discussed in these articles in a range of ways. Discussions about legislation constitute just less than half of the articles. The rest feature issues such as medical insurance for abortion, the provision of abortifacients by pharmaceutical companies, the rights of nurses and doctors to object to performing abortion on moral grounds, the so-called population explosion and films, exhibitions and court cases involving illegal abortions. As such, the person most directly affected by debates about abortion, *viz*, the woman presenting for a termination of pregnancy, is absent or erased from these kinds of discussion.

The name 'minor' was the least frequently used (6.3% of articles) and appeared only in Epochs 5 (9.2%), 6 (2.6%) and 7 (13.9%). Although it was mostly used to refer to the legal status of a person (particularly in relation to the CTOP Act clause allowing minors to request abortion without parental consent), it was also used in a similar fashion to the name 'girl/teenager/child', discussed below.

Table 3. Percentage of articles in which the naming categories were used.

	Articles with exclusive use of name (%)	Articles with name used in combination with other names (%)	Total articles featuring name (%)
Girl/teenager/ child	4	21.3	25.3
Mother	3.3	22	25.3
Patient	1.3	9.6	10.9
Minor	0.3	6	6.3
Woman	27.3	42.3	69.6
No name at all			20

Use of the name 'girl/teenager/child'

The percentage of articles in the complete data set in which the name 'girl/teenager/child' is used is 25.3%. Thus, a quarter of all articles refer to the woman presenting for an abortion using a name that conjures images of dependence, vulnerability and lack of capacity, a reading reinforced by dominant Developmental Psychology theories in which girls, children and teenagers are normalised as dependent, immature, irrational and less competent than women (Burman 2008).

The lowest proportion (19.1%) of articles using the name 'girl', 'teenager' or 'child' occurs in the Epoch 5, during the time of debate concerning the legalisation of abortion and the passing of the Act. This was also the epoch in which the most articles about abortion appeared and during which activists, using health and women's rights arguments, actively engaged with the media (Klugman and Varkey 2001).

The name 'girl/teenager/child' was used in contradictory ways in relation to the politics of abortion. On the one hand, it was used to argue for a liberalisation of abortion legislation, as indicated in the extract below. This only occurred in the earlier epochs:

Public sentiment would appear to be one of sympathy for the 20-year-old Free State girl in the middle of an abortion storm. Several people have criticized the abortion act saying if it wasn't so restrictive the girl would not be going through the agony she is now. (Garbett, Harding, and Dyer 1980)

An abortion was recommended on psychiatric grounds under the Abortion and Sterilization Act for the woman discussed in the above extract. Her parents opposed the abortion and, owing to the length of time taken to decide on the case, an abortion could no longer be performed. In the extract, the use of the name 'girl' lends weight to the argument that the reader should feel sympathy and that some measure of protection (in the form of more liberal legislation) is required. Abortion itself is depicted as a benign act that resolves unwanted pregnancies.

On the one other hand, during later epochs especially, the names, 'girl', 'teenager' or 'child' were used to bolster opposition to abortion, as illustrated in the following extracts:

Abortion deals with the product of lack of knowledge and it would seem a far better thing to have children taught at primary level about sex than to have young girls rushing off for abortion. (Horler 1990)

Young girls scarcely more than children themselves – often too young to drive – are to be empowered to murder their babies without even having to consult their parents. (Nash 1996)

In the first of these extracts, the assumption that girls, by virtue of their age, are less informed and less responsible than older women is used to support the claim that they are more likely to act impulsively, as implied in the statement 'rushing off for abortion'. Addressing lack of knowledge is thus presented as the solution to abortion, with the implication that this is the sole factor in sexual relations that lead to an unwanted pregnancy. Abortion itself is constructed as an irrational act that is 'rushed' into and that results from lack of knowledge. In the second extract above, the age at which young people may attain a driving licence is used to draw attention to a traditional benchmark of adulthood. By association, the immaturity of the girl is emphasised. The word 'empowered' is used ironically to highlight the ridiculousness of considering young women capable of independent agency. It is precisely this assumption (*viz* young women's inability to make an adequately informed decision) that has underpinned parental consent laws in some states of the USA (Adler, Ozer, and Tschann 2003). Abortion itself is constructed as murder, a serious matter that should not be allowed at all, let alone for young women.

The name 'girl'/'teenager'/'child' was also used to oppose the CTOP Act's parental consent clause:

In support of their claim that it will always be in the best interests of the girl to consult with her parent or guardian, the CLA says that during pregnancy a woman is emotionally vulnerable as a result of hormonal fluctuations in her body and physical changes in outward appearance. A CLA spokesperson says their concern is that minors do not always have the mental capacity to make correct decisions and that in a matter as serious as abortion, which has both medical and psychological ramifications, the best interests of the child will be served if this decision is made without the support and consent of a parent or guardian. (Meeson 2003)

In this extract, emotional vulnerability and the lack of 'mental capacity' of the individual girl requires action by others, positioned implicitly as rational, emotionally stable and capable, in the 'best interests' of the 'child'. This lack of capacity of the part of the girl is paired with an unequivocal statement about the consequences of abortion, which, it is implied, can only be understood by adults. There has been much (fairly vociferous) debate in the literature on the medical and psychological consequences of legal abortion. Many of the studies suffer from methodological flaws, as indicated by the recent American Psychological Association's review, in which it is asserted that there is not sufficient evidence to support the claim that an observed association between abortion history and mental health was caused by the abortion *per se*, as opposed to other factors (Major et al. 2008). In stressing the medical and psychological consequences, the CLA spokesperson is deploying the recent anti-abortion women-centred tactic, which constructs abortion as traumatic rather than as foetal murder and positions anti-abortion activists as caring and concerned rather than anti-women's rights (Hopkins, Reicher, and Saleem 1996).

The emphasis on immaturity, vulnerability and lack of capacity in relation to girls, teenagers or children allowed for the emergence of two distinct positionings. The first is as somebody in need of understanding, care and support. The second is to position her as the pathologised other.

The first, which was used to oppose as well as to defend liberal abortion laws, is illustrated in some of the extracts above and in the following abstract:

What strikes one from the news report about this 19-year-old girl [who self-aborted and buried the foetus in a nearby forest] is how very alone she was, living in a community that noticed her pregnancy but did not support her, probably ignorant of safe sex practice or that she had a legal right to an early abortion. (Clemshaw 2002)

Both the first and the last of the abstracts cited evoke sympathy for the young women as restrictive abortion legislation, and an uncaring community and ignorance led to their not being able to access an abortion, which in turn led to their suffering 'agony' and 'loneliness'. In the extract above, the young woman was prosecuted as a result of performing an abortion herself. In both cases, the vulnerability of the young women is emphasised, which implies a need for care and protection. This kind of care and protection is evidenced in the fourth extract although here it is used to advocate for more restrictive legislation.

The second manner in which the developmental status of the 'girl/teenager/child' is dealt with is to position her as the pathologised other. Unsurprisingly, this positioning is only used to oppose abortion:

There are young girls who get pregnant then work in a sly manner to obtain an abortion by circumventing the law. (*Hoofstad* 1979, translated from Afrikaans)

When all young girls start to kill their unborn babies will they make good women in the future? Who will be prepared to marry an abortionist? (*Sowetan* 1996)

In the first of the above extracts the young woman is depicted as deviously obtaining an abortion. She is portrayed as having agency in the sense that she goes to 'work' to circumvent the law. In the second, the woman within the 'girl' is described as being perverted through abortion. Such a woman is tainted as a wife and good woman. Implicitly, women who are willing to take on the mantle of the maternal and to submit to the desires of men are constructed as the ideal. The pathologising of young women in these extracts is paired with a depiction of abortion as an immoral, irresponsible and murderous act.

Table 4 summarises the various positionings and associated constructions and political positions enabled associated with the name 'girl/teenager/child'. It highlights the variability in manner in which this name is used.

Use of the name 'mother'

The percentage of articles overall in which the naming category 'mother' was used is 25.3%. The name mother was used proportionately more frequently in Epochs 1 (38.45%) and 2 (29.41%) and less frequently in Epochs 6 (15.78%) and 7 (22.22%). Although the earlier articles do not refer directly to 'white mothers', it is possible that the higher usage of this name is related to the racially based pro-natalism of the Apartheid regime, with newspapers being aimed chiefly at a white readership. Given the dominant sexual and reproductive health and rights approach of the post-Apartheid government, the emphasis on the maternal seems to have lost ground and a lower percentage of articles referred to women contemplating or undergoing an abortion as mother in the later epochs.

Referring to a woman who is pregnant, but has not borne a child, as a mother draws on what Meyers (2001) calls *matrigyno-idolatry*, *viz.*, discourses that promote the imperative of procreation as the only route to womanhood and femininity. In this, women become defined by their reproductive capacity and 'maternal instinct' or their 'biological drive' towards conceiving, bearing and nurturing children, as seen below:

Our daughter will be persuaded to agree to have the baby. She might even decide to keep it herself because she is developing a natural motherly instinct. (Norton 1980).

The destruction of human life in the womb has grave consequences not just for the unborn child but also for the mother. (Graham 2004)

The first of these extracts refers to the same woman spoken about in extract 1, albeit in a different newspaper. She moves from being referred to as a 'girl' in extract 1 to being referred to as a 'mother' here. In this extract the development of a 'natural motherly instinct' is seen as inevitable following a pregnancy. Once this instinct takes root, the woman is powerless to resist the inevitable course of bearing and caring for the child.

Table 4. Name: girl.

Positioning		Abortion constructed as		Supports argument for
DILV Need for protection	+	Benign act resolving unwanted pregnancies	=	Liberalisation of legislation
DILV Need for protection	+	Traumatic irrational act	=	Abortion under medical conditions
Pathologised other		Immoral act murder		Restriction in legislation

Note: DILV: Dependent, immature, lacking capacity, vulnerable.

The use of the words ‘unborn child/baby’ imposes the subjectivity of motherhood on the woman along with all the accompanying culturally constructed responsibilities, including protection of the young. The foetus and woman are fixed in a relationship that is made to seem the inevitable outcome of all pregnancies (Ruhl 2002). Abortion implicitly fractures the maternal relationship and thus the potential for care and support.

These representations of the foetus as an ‘unborn baby’ and woman as ‘mother’ draw on the dominant trend in developmental psychology of treating mothering as a dyadic relationship (Burman 2008). This focus forefronts the mother-child interaction while obscuring broader micro- and macro-level power relations – power relations that have been shown through research to be key features of pregnancy and mothering (Kruger 2006). In South Africa, for example, Frizelle and Kell (2010) indicate how ‘race, class, sexual orientation and gender intersect with dominant ideologies of motherhood to inform the experiences of [their sample of] sub-urban, middle-class women negotiating, within a complex set of relationships, what it is to be a mother’ (26).

The use of the name mother allowed for two distinct positionings. The first is as the ‘innocent mother’ who, as a result of medical or psychiatric illness, cannot be held responsible for needing an abortion. The second is as the ‘dangerous mother’ who poses a threat to her ‘baby’. The first of these featured more strongly in the earlier epochs, in which arguments were made for there being special circumstances under which abortion could be seen as justified. The following extracts provide examples:

As Medea points out, if there are medical difficulties, the present legislation apparently makes adequate provision to safeguard the mother’s life. (Konya 1979)

The only time in which there can be talk of therapy, is when an abortion is performed in the interests of the mother’s well-being. (*Die Burger* 1982, translated from Afrikaans)

In these extracts the mother is not vilified. She is pardoned for not fulfilling the mandate to become a mother once pregnant as there are extenuating circumstances such as ‘medical difficulties’ and the need for ‘therapy’. Abortion is still constructed as disrupting the maternal relationship, but this must be tolerated in medical circumstances.

In later epochs, when the debate turned towards the legalisation of abortion, the ‘innocent mother’ positioning faded and was replaced by the ‘dangerous mother’ positioning as evidenced in the following extract:

An innocent human life in the ‘protection’ of his mother’s body does not have the right to life. When it has come this far, then a woman’s womb has become the most dangerous place on earth. (Bingle and Gaum 1995, translated from Afrikaans)

Here, the assumption of the mother as protector and provider is used to position the body of a woman who has an abortion as the ‘most dangerous place on earth’. The ‘dangerous mother’ position appears here in conjunction with a construction of foetal personhood and of abortion as murder. Table 5 summarises the positionings discussed above.

Table 5. Name: mother.

Positioning	Abortion constructed as	Supports argument for
Pregnancy = motherhood	Disrupting maternal relationship	
Innocent mother	Medical necessity in some circumstances	Abortion under medical conditions
Dangerous mother	Murder	Restriction of abortion

Use of the name 'patient'

Women were referred to as patients relatively infrequently in the articles (10.9% of all articles). The name patient was used proportionately more frequently (16.3%) in Epoch 5 when advocates for the CTOP Act stressed the public health implications of restrictive abortion legislation.

The use of the name 'patient' constructs abortion as a medical procedure and the woman as in need of medical assistance. This construction was complicated in the earlier epochs, however. Qualitative analysis revealed that in these epochs, the woman as patient was pitted against the foetus as patient. This bifurcation of the pregnant body led to some (minimal) discussion on the doctor's role, as evidenced below:

'It is important that each doctor realises that with a pregnant women he has two patients: mother and child.' ... The mother and foetus/child has an equal right to life. The role of the doctor is to relieve the suffering of the parents and child, but not to act as executioner. (*Die Burger* 1982, translated from Afrikaans)

Here, the pitting of the 'mother-as-patient' against the 'foetus-as-patient' provides a dilemma for the doctor as healer in the context of abortion. The relief of suffering is depicted as legitimate, but not abortion, which is equated with execution.

In later epochs, the bifurcation of the woman's body into two patients falls away and instead the woman becomes a patient suffering from incomplete abortion or is a legitimate termination of pregnancy patient, as evidenced in the extracts below:

A large number of patients, approximately 20 a week, are admitted with incomplete abortions. (Underhill 1996)

The film showed how nurses made patients clean up after themselves and refused them help even when they called out for it. (*Cape Argus* 2002)

The extent and consequences of incomplete abortion during the time of the restrictive Abortion and Sterilization Act were a key public reproductive health concern (Jewkes et al. 2002) and were used by activist groups to lobby for the legalisation of abortion. In the first of the above accounts, reference is made to women admitted to a hospital following incomplete abortion. The film referred to in the second account was screened by an investigative news programme called *Carte Blanche*, in which poor conditions in a termination-of-pregnancy clinic were exposed. The women are presented in this extract as legitimate health users (patients) who should receive adequate health care, and abortion is constructed as medical event that should be performed under safe and contained conditions. Table 6 summarises the 'patient' positionings and attendant constructions of abortion.

Use of the name 'woman'

The naming category 'woman' is present in 69.6% of all articles analysed, either exclusively or in combination with other indicators. This is unsurprising as it is the most

Table 6. Name: patient.

Positioning	Abortion constructed as	Supports argument for
In need of medical assistance	Medical procedure	Abortion for medical reasons
Bifurcation (mother-as-patient versus foetus-as-patient)	Medical procedure (foetus or 'mother')	Abortion for medical reasons
Woman as patient	Medical procedure/ health imperative	Abortion as a public health issue

neutral way of referring to women facing the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy and abortion. However, the use of the generic term woman potentially glosses over the vastly different contexts in which women live, as highlighted by post-colonial feminists (Spivak 1988), and in which they make reproductive decisions:

The new legislation makes it possible for any pregnant woman to demand an abortion without strings attached. More significantly she has the power to decide for herself on matters affecting her body and health. Regardless of her age and marital status she does not need the permission of a partner or parent to have a safe legal abortion, nor does she have to inform either. (Salie 1997)

In this extract, women are constructed as homogeneous ('any pregnant woman' may 'demand an abortion without strings attached'). Their circumstances are depicted as being completely transformed by a change in abortion legislation. A woman now has the 'power to decide', she is able to 'demand' abortion and does not need 'permission' to have an abortion. There is no acknowledgement of the range of factors that may affect the woman's ability to access abortion services: whether she lives in an urban or rural area, gendered power relations within the family, religious milieu of her community, access to termination of pregnancy services etc. The implication is that the legislation not only conceptualises a woman as a fully autonomous citizen, but also removes all obstacles that threatened her autonomy before. This reflects the findings made by Rabe (2002), who indicates that representations of women in the South African media frequently remove them from their contexts and deny the realities of their everyday experience.

Where differentiation between women was made in the articles, it was most frequently around race. The use of clear racial descriptors such as 'black' or 'white' appeared in 14.3% of all articles published over 28 years, although, as stated above, other words such as 'poor', 'rural' and 'disadvantaged' also appeared. These descriptors were used in the newspaper articles and by activists to emphasise racial, class- and location-based differentiation in access to services, both prior to the CTOP Act (Cope 1993) and after its implementation (Varkey, Fonn, and Ketlhapile 2000) and, as such, provide a more contextually relevant positioning of women.

Conclusion

This research has shown that the subject positionings enabled by the naming of women presenting for abortion are dynamic and complex and are intricately interwoven with the localised politics of abortion of the moment. Thus, we saw how the name 'mother' and 'patient' were invoked in very different ways in the earlier epochs compared to the later epochs studied in this research, with certain positionings (the 'innocent mother' and the bifurcated 'patient') being deployed under restrictive abortion access and others (the 'dangerous' mother and woman as 'patient') being used more frequently under liberal abortion legislation. We saw how particular subject positionings may be used in contradictory ways, both to oppose abortion and to argue for a liberalisation of restrictive legislation. This use depends on the attendant construction of abortion. Thus, the construction of abortion as murder and of 'girls' as immature and irrational provides space for advocacy to restrict abortion. On the other hand, the construction of abortion as a benign act that solves an unwanted pregnancy and of girls as immature and vulnerable suggest arguments for liberalising abortion laws. When abortion is viewed as an immoral act or murder and young women seeking an abortion as the pathologised other, severe restrictions on abortion are suggested.

The positionings deployed with respect to women presenting for abortion simultaneously draw on and reproduce cultural constructions of the subjectivity of the reproductive woman. The use of the name 'mother' reinforces matrigyno-idolatory discourses that promote the imperative of procreation for women and casts women who terminate a pregnancy as disrupting this natural process. The positioning of the 'girl/teenager/child' as dependent, vulnerable and lacking capacity allows for deployment of discourses of care and protection and, contradictorily, of othering, both of which are embedded in an understanding that youth and decision-making regarding reproduction are mutually exclusive. The patient positioning constructs the reproductive woman as a healthcare user who requires adequate reproductive healthcare.

While the names 'mother', 'patient' and 'girl' provide delimited, albeit contradictory, subject positions, the name 'woman' or 'minor' promise a certain level of neutrality. The naming of 'woman', however, is frequently linked to the liberal imaginary of 'choice', in which the individual is depicted as rationally deciding on a course of action and exercising control over her body (Ruhl 2002). In this, the social inequities that have direct implications in terms of women's reproductive lives and their ability to 'choose' are glossed over. The depiction of the woman in these terms is enabled in the post-Apartheid context by the emphasis on human rights implied in the Constitution. The name 'minor', used only in the post-Apartheid context, also promises neutral reference. Often, however, it was used as a direct substitute for girl/teenager/child.

Naming and positioning the subject serves as a powerful tool in the politics of abortion. As women's bodies are the fulcrum around which debates and controversies regarding abortion revolve, the subject positionings that are publicly deployed concerning women presenting for abortion and the attendant constructions of abortion have fundamental implications in how debates, legislation and practices surrounding abortion unfold.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by the National Research Foundation of South Africa. Thank you to Nicola Graham, Katherine Furman for research assistance and to the anonymous reviewers for helpful comments.

References

- Abortion and Sterilization Act, No. 2. 1975. *Government Gazette*, Section 3, 478.
- Adler, N.E., E.J. Ozer, and J.M. Tschann. 2003. Abortion among adolescents. *American Psychologist* 58, no. 3: 211–7.
- Bingle, P., and F. Gaum. 1995. Aborsie is ten diepste niks anders as moord nie [Abortion is essentially nothing other than murder]. *Die Burger*, September 21, 18.
- Burman, E. 2008. *Deconstructing developmental psychology*. 2nd ed Hove, UK: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1999. Performativity's social magic. In *Bourdieu: A critical reader*, ed. R. Schusterman, 113–28. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cape Argus*. 2002. When nurses have to do their jobs, July 12, 11.
- Choice on Termination of Pregnancy (CTOP) Act, No. 92. 1996. *Government Gazette*, Section 2, 45.
- Cleminshaw, D. 2002. Compassion rather than condemnation. *Mail & Guardian*, April 25, 22.
- Cope, J. 1993. *A matter of choice: Abortion reform in apartheid South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: Hadeda.
- Davies, B., and R. Harré. 1999. Positioning and personhood. In *Positioning Theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, ed. R. Harré and L. Van Langenhove, 32–52. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Die Burger*. 1982. Bedenkinge geopper oor gewettige aborsie [Concerns raised about legal abortion], June 25, 9.
- Frizelle, K., and G. Kell. 2010. A contextual account of motherhood. *Psychology in South Africa (PINS)* 39: 26–44.

- Garbett, S., M. Harding, and J. Dyer. 1980. Agony: A child she doesn't want. *The Star*, March 14, 14.
- Girard, F., and W. Nowicka. 2002. Clear and compelling evidence: The Polish tribunal on abortion rights. *Reproductive Health Matters* 10, no. 19: 22–30.
- Global Media Monitoring Project. 2005. *South African National Report 2005*. World Association for Christian Communication (WACC). <http://www.whomakesthenews.org/reports/2005-global-report.html>
- Graham, D. 2004. Call to end legal abortions. *The Citizen*, August 4, 1.
- Harries, J. 2009. Termination of pregnancy legislation in South Africa: Implications for health service providers. *Continuing Medical Education* 27, no. 10: 462–64.
- Health Systems Trust. 2011. *Terminations of pregnancy*. Health Systems Trust. <http://indicators.hst.org.za/healthstats/47/data>
- Hoofstad. 1979. Oppas vir swanger vrou-arts [Beware of pregnant gynaecologists]. October 3, 3.
- Hopkins, N., S. Reicher, and J. Saleem. 1996. Constructing women's psychological health in anti-abortion rhetoric. *Sociological Review* 44, no. 3: 539–64.
- Horler, V. 1990. Abortion: Time to rethink Act. *The Star*, March 13, 14.
- Jewkes, R., H. Brown, K. Dickson-Tetteh, and H. Rees. 2002. Prevalence of morbidity associated with abortion before and after legalisation in South Africa. *British Medical Journal* 324, no. 7348: 1252–3.
- Karpov, V., and K. Kaumläriäinen. 2005. 'Abortion culture' in Russia: Its origins, scope and challenge to social development. *Journal of Applied Sociology* 22, no. 2: 13–33.
- Klausen, S. 2010. 'Reclaiming the white daughter's purity': Afrikaner nationalism, racialized sexuality, and the 1975 Abortion and Sterilization Act in Apartheid South Africa. *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 3: 39–63.
- Klugman, B. 1990. The politics of contraception in South Africa. *Women's Studies International Forum* 13, no. 3: 261–71.
- Klugman, B., and D. Budlender. 2001. Preface. In *Advocating for abortion access: Eleven country studies, The Johannesburg Initiative*, ed. B. Klugman and D. Budlender, vi–xii. Johannesburg: Women's Health Project, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Klugman, B., and S. Varkey. 2001. From policy development to policy implementation: The South African Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act. In *Advocating for abortion access: Eleven country studies, The Johannesburg Initiative*, ed. B. Klugman and D. Budlender, 251–82. Johannesburg: Women's Health Project, School of Public Health, University of the Witwatersrand.
- Konya, P. 1979. There two sides to the abortion story. *Pretoria News*, June 20, 14.
- Kruger, L. 2006. Motherhood. In *The gender of psychology*, ed. T. Shefer, F. Boozaier, and P. Kiguwa, 182–97. Cape Town: UCT Press.
- Lee, E. 2002. Psychologizing abortion: Women's 'mental health' and the regulation of abortion in Britain. In *Well women: The gendered nature of health care provision*, ed. A. Morris and S. Nott, 61–78. Burlington, UK: Ashgate.
- Lowe-Morna, C. 2006. *Who makes the news? Mirror on the Southern African findings of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) 2005*. Johannesburg: Gender Links.
- Luker, K. 1985. *Abortion and politics of motherhood*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Major, B., M. Appelbaum, L. Beckman, M. Dutton, N. Russo, and C. West. 2008. Report of the APA task force on mental health and abortion. APA. <http://www.apa.org/pi/wpo/mental-health-abortion-report.pdf>
- Meeson, A. 2003. My decision or yours, mom? *City Press*, May 4, 23.
- Meyers, D.T. 2001. The rush to motherhood: Pronatalist discourse and women's autonomy. *Signs* 26, no. 3: 735–73.
- Nash, D. 1996. Open letter to President Mandela. *The Star*, October 28, 9.
- Neuendorf, K. 2002. *The content analysis guidebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Norton, I. 1980. Reprieve for unborn baby. *Rand Daily Mail*, March 24, 1.
- Parker, I. 1990. Discourse: Definitions and contradictions. *Philosophical Psychology* 3, no. 2: 189–202.
- Phillips, L., and W.M. Jørgensen. 2002. *Discourse analysis as theory and method*. London: Sage.
- Rabe, L. 2002. Evolution: The status of female voice in South African media. *Ecquid Novi* 23, no. 1: 152–69.
- Rakow, L. and L. Wackwitz, eds. 2004. *Feminist communication theory: Selections in context*. London: Sage.

- Rohlinger, D.A. 2006. Framing the abortion debate: Organizational resources, media strategies and movement-countermovement dynamics. *Sociological Quarterly* 43, no. 4: 479–507.
- Ruhl, L. 2002. Disarticulating liberal subjectivities: Abortion and fetal protection. *Feminist Studies* 28, no. 1: 37–60.
- Salie, A. 1997. No rush for abortions under new law. *Cape Times*, February 4, 5.
- Siegel, R.B. 2007. The new politics of abortion: An equality analysis of woman-protective abortion restrictions. *University of Illinois Law Review* 3: 991–1053, Yale University. <http://www.law.yale.edu/documents/pdf/Faculty/SiegelTheNewPoliticsofAbortion2.pdf>.
- Skerjidal, T. 2000. Bill on demand: South African newspapers fighting the abortion issue in 1995/96. *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 21, no. 1: 62–83.
- Smyth, L. 2002. Feminism and abortion politics: Choice, rights and reproductive freedom. *Women's Studies International Forum* 25, no. 3: 335–45.
- Sowetan. 1996. Abortion decision is very wrong, November 8, 10.
- Spivak, G. 1988. Can the subaltern speak? In *Marxism and interpretation of culture*, ed. C. Nelson and L. Grossberg, 271–313. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Tan, S., and F.M. Moghaddam. 1999. Positioning in intergroup relations. In *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, ed. R. Harré and L. Van Langenhove, 178–94. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Tomaselli, K., and P. Louw. 1989. The South African progressive press under emergency, 1986–1988. *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies* 10, no. 1–2: 70–94.
- Underhill, G. 1996. Abortion demand grows. *Weekend Argus*, May 19, 15.
- Van Langenhove, L., and R. Harré. 1999. Introducing positioning theory. In *Positioning theory: Moral contexts of intentional action*, ed. R. Harré and L. Van Langenhove, 14–31. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Varkey, S., S. Fonn, and M. Kethlapile. 2000. The role of advocacy in implementing the South African abortion law. *Reproductive Health Matters* 8, no. 16: 103–11.
- World Health Organisation. 2007. *Unsafe abortion: Global and regional estimates of the incidence of unsafe abortion and associated mortality in 2003*. 5th ed. Geneva: Author.

Résumé

La manière dont les femmes qui ont recours à l'avortement sont représentées dans le discours public est un élément clé des relations de pouvoir, d'ordre culturel et basées sur le genre, qui gravitent autour de la question de l'avortement. Nous analysons comment les femmes ont été évoquées et positionnées dans les articles de la presse sud-africaine centrés sur la question de l'avortement entre 1978 et 2005, une période de changements politiques et législatifs radicaux. Nous examinons aussi les constructions associées à l'avortement dans ces mêmes articles. Le mot «femme» a été le plus fréquemment employé (70% des articles) et a précédé ceux de «fille/adolescente» (25%), «mère» (25%), patiente (11%) et «mineure» (6%). Les positionnements facilités par l'usage de ces mots étaient dynamiques, complexes et entrelacés avec les politiques localisées et historiques sur l'avortement. Celui des «mères innocentes» et du/de la «patient(e)», au caractère bifurqué (femme/fœtus) ont été invoqués dans les premières années pour promouvoir l'avortement encadré médicalement. Ceux de «la mère dangereuse» et de la femme, perçue en tant que «patiente», ont été employés plus fréquemment dans une époque de lois libérales sur l'avortement, pour exprimer une opposition à ce dernier ou plaider en sa faveur, respectivement. Le positionnement de la «fille/adolescente/enfant» en tant qu'être dépendant et vulnérable a été employé pour exprimer des opinions contradictoires, c'est à dire aussi bien pour une opposition à l'avortement que pour plaider en faveur d'un assouplissement de lois restrictives, ces opinions étant déterminées par les constructions associées de l'avortement. L'emploi du terme neutre «femme» a quelquefois été associé à l'imaginaire libéral du «choix».

Resumen

Un elemento fundamental en las relaciones culturales y de poder entre los sexos en torno al aborto es cómo se representa en los discursos públicos a las mujeres que se someten a un aborto. Aquí analizamos cómo se designa y sitúa a las mujeres, y qué construcciones se derivan sobre el aborto, en los artículos de periódicos sudafricanos sobre el aborto entre 1978 y 2005, un periodo en el que ocurrieron muchos cambios radicales en el ámbito político y legislativo. La palabra 'mujer' fue la

que se utilizó con más frecuencia (70% de los artículos) seguido de 'chica/adolescente/niña' (25%), 'madre' (25%), 'paciente' (11%) y 'menor' (6%). Los posicionamientos de los sujetos que se lograron mediante estas palabras eran dinámicos y complejos, y estaban imbricados en la situación política, localizada e histórica del aborto. Los posicionamientos de 'madre inocente' y 'paciente' bifurcada (mujer/feto) fueron invocadas en épocas anteriores para fomentar el aborto en condiciones sanitarias adecuadas. Los posicionamientos de 'madre peligrosa' y mujer como 'paciente' se utilizaron con más frecuencia en el periodo de la legislación del aborto liberal para oponerse y defender el aborto respectivamente. El posicionamiento de 'chica/adolescente/niña' como dependiente y vulnerable se utilizó de forma contradictoria, tanto para oponerse al aborto como para defender una liberalización de la legislación restrictiva, según la construcción asociada al aborto. El término neutral de 'mujer' se vinculó a veces a la imaginación liberal de 'elección'.