

“Pretty as a peach”: Some thoughts on the gendered representations of Reeva Steenkamp’s murder in three South African publications

ABSTRACT

South Africa’s media are often touted as lacking ethics in favour of sensationalism (Cronin, 2010). Wasserman (2007) argues that this could be a consequence of the increased circulation of daily tabloids in the country, which has been a result of an emerging new public that was marginalised by the mainstream press of the apartheid era. However, by taking this argument forward, one becomes entrenched in the wrongful assumption that tabloids are a journalistic evil, and are the epitome of “bad journalism” (Ornekring & Jonssen, 2004). This paper uses the example of the *Sunday Times* and *City Press* newspapers’ coverage of Oscar Pistorius’ arrest and bail application in February 2013 to demonstrate how two of South Africa’s most widely read traditional Sunday newspapers represented Pistorius in the same manner as *You* magazine, South Africa’s most widely read English tabloid style magazine. The paper acknowledges that tabloid-style reporting is not necessarily as “bad” as its critics maintain, but argues that ethically, reporting could (and should) have been handled differently. The paper analyses the stereotyped representation of Steenkamp and Pistorius in all three publications, and following the work of Clifford Christians (2009), uses these examples to highlight problems with the traditional utilitarian frameworks that govern modern news reporting.

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INTRODUCTION

On 14 February 2013, news media around the world broke the story that South Africa's Oscar Pistorius, paralympic gold medallist and the first double amputee to compete in the able-bodied Olympics, had been arrested for the murder of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, a model, law graduate, and strong advocate on social issues including rape, violence and bullying. Before Pistorius had even been charged, both local and international news agencies began speculating as to whether the crime was pre-meditated or a tragic accident. The media seemed intent on following the narrative of a tragic fallen hero and his victim, reporting on events before any facts were verified – including a bloodied cricket bat, a bludgeoned skull, a pattern of domestic abuse and non-existent steroids supposedly found in Pistorius' night stand.

The media narrative which subsequently rapidly unfolded, apart from being largely inaccurate, was also (perhaps not unexpectedly) shallow: a beautiful young, white South African couple, surrounded by celebrity, privilege and wealth, and including an international sporting hero and a model, come to a tragic end on Valentine's Day. It is interesting to note that Steenkamp took second place in the story of her own death: "she is not the core of *the* story; it's not even *her* story" (Liddiard, 2014:1). Liddiard (2014) highlights that the two central characters who caught both local and international media attention were the "Supercrip" (a reference to Pistorius' almost superhuman feats in athletics as a disabled person) and the imagined (black) intruder, with Orford (2014) arguing that both were cultural productions. Global traditional and social media provided constant coverage for the first two weeks after the shooting, and the issue has remained in the media limelight since then.

Because of the huge degree of engagement from citizens on social media, this presented the traditional South African media with extraordinary challenges. Dawes (2013, in De Waal, 2013) has argued that the situation created journalistic difficulties "because of the competitiveness of the environment, the requirements of speed and because the legal and forensic issues are complex and the picture can change very quickly". Tom Eaton (2013), from South Africa's only online daily newspaper, *The Daily Maverick*, argued that when it comes to "sociopathic scandal-mongering, certain sections of South Africa's media can compete with the foulest in the world". Eaton highlights the media's own contribution to its damaged image and points out how, thanks to its sensationalist overtones, it leads one to believe that South Africa's mainstream media epitomise those tabloid traits "which serious, responsible, good quality journalism is not: sensationalist, over-simplified, populist, etc." (Ornebring & Jonssen, 2004:284). Indeed, "little attention is paid to the extent to which mainstream journalism also peddles entertainment, sensational event-based journalism, superficial analysis or biased news coverage" (Wasserman, 2006:64).

This paper begins by asking the question, has South Africa's media deviated from reporting the facts in favour of a sensational gender-conformative narrative? Following from this, is it possible for this type of narrative to exist in any ethical framework?

This paper, consequently, critically analyses the online coverage of the *Sunday Times* and *City Press* newspapers from 14 February to 28 February 2013 with the ultimate intention of highlighting if these publications were concerned more with the performance of gender norms than with fair and ethical reporting. It then analyses a special edition of *You* magazine at the beginning of March 2013, which coincided with Pistorius' bail application, to help highlight the similarities between this tabloid-style magazine and the two more traditional broadsheet newspapers. The paper also briefly discusses two issues which have influenced media coverage in recent years, namely, the rise of tabloid-style reporting in South Africa and the impact of social media, whose unprecedented speed and widespread dissemination of information among ordinary members of the public has led to traditional media being challenged to confront this phenomenon in various ways.

1. ETHICS AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

There is no doubt that the advent of social media affected the initial breaking of the Steenkamp murder, and had repercussions on consequent coverage. Where social media is concerned, writers continually debate how journalists should report on events as fairly and accurately as possible, and one of the fundamental issues raised within this process is the concept of "public interest". It is understood that, at times, "the public has a legitimate need to know information that other people would like to keep private" (Jones, 2008), and journalists are frequently faced with a moral dilemma when disseminating private information, questioning how far they should infringe on an individual's fundamental right to privacy (Jones & Pitcher, 2015). Some ethicists argue that "it is just for a journalist to violate the privacy of an individual only if information about that individual is of overriding public importance, and the public need cannot be met by any other means" (Hodges, 1994:203), whereas contradictory arguments include Jones' (2004) and Archard's (1998) discussions on the valuable social purposes served by gossip, and Appadurai's (1996) discussions on a right to pleasure without cultural "guilt". But how relevant is this discussion in the current climate of new media technology? Website applications such as Twitter and Facebook encourage users to collapse distinctions between public and private, and concentrate on sharing and collaborating information and ideas, and the Pistorius saga set social media alight with rumours, allegation, gossip and even "fan clubs". Dawes (2013 in De Waal, 2013) argues that the role of traditional media in this situation is "to help make meaning out of it", without newspapers or journalists losing sight of their focus or identity. Undoubtedly, journalists should be at liberty to use private information circulating through social networks (which are very public), but like other gossip, this information should be treated with caution. Consequently, journalists dealing with information appropriated from social networks should be extremely careful, and "like any other information it needs to be verified before it is published" (Jones & Pitcher, 2015:297).

In terms of mainstream media, *Beeld* broke the Steenkamp shooting on Twitter as an "accidental shooting". However, within a few hours the frame had changed from accidental shooting to murder, highlighted by a more tabloid-style type of reporting. The narrative appeared to focus on the sensationalism of the crime rather than the validity of facts. There was a proliferation of stories on the websites of both of the scrutinised newspapers during the last two weeks of February, and fairly consistent stories subsequently which concentrated on salacious angles and presumptions

most often founded through gossip on social media than from traditionally “checked” journalistic sources.

Consequently, the following questions need to be asked:

- How did the change from “accidental shooting” to “murder” alter the representation of the characters in the narrative?
- How did the salaciousness of this change alter the expected role of traditional investigative newspapers?
- And, did this shift bring the ethics of the publications into question?

As mentioned above, there are arguments which set out the benefits of gossip and tabloid-style reporting, but before one is able to assess the ethical issues that tabloid-style reporting raise, it is important to understand the arguments surrounding tabloid journalism. Wasserman (2006:60) claims that “tabloids are viewed as posing a danger to the image of journalism in the eyes of the public” on two levels. Firstly, they are considered to be of inferior quality to mainstream journalism, and secondly, tabloids lack any firm ethical standards to guide their journalists (Wasserman, 2006).

However, if this is the case, then one should question why a mainstream publication like *The Sunday Times* seemingly adopted tabloid-style reporting as discussed below. Wasserman (2006:60-61) believes that “[i]n the debates about tabloids, the norms and assumptions of the mainstream media are manifested in a process of paradigm repair”. By highlighting the shortcomings of tabloid reporting, editors and academics are able to highlight how traditional journalism should be practised, and thus showcase to the public the values and responsibilities of mainstream reporting.

Froneman (2005) goes so far as to argue that the sensational nature of tabloids could contribute to undermining quality public discourse. However, if one examines the work of de Backer and Fisher (2012), it becomes apparent that the nature of tabloid news plays an important function in the development of community and culture. They claim that gossip was essential to the survival of early humans. “Acquiring information on who was having sex with whom, who was fighting with whom, and who had access to valuable resources would have increased individuals’ ability to navigate their social environment, and consequently their ability to obtain access to mates and resources” (de Backer & Fisher, 2012:407). And even though society has changed and grown larger, the sensational aspects of tabloid stories help maintain the status quo. Tabloids perpetuate stereotypes and ridicule those who deviate from accepted social norm; consequently, they help ensure the hegemonic integrity of the dominant classes (de Backer & Fisher, 2012).

However, is this necessarily responsible? One of the most telling arguments that has been made in relation to a responsible press is that information that is published should be in the public interest (Kruger, 2006). Critics of the media in South Africa have argued that it is too concerned with presenting information that is merely interesting to the public rather than that which is in the

interest of the public (Cronin, 2010). However, in light of these arguments, Wasserman (2006) makes a refreshing claim and one that many writers have failed to acknowledge: the "public", which was conceptualised when the idea of "public interest" first came into being, has changed. One could argue this is because the traditional normative framework of the press, in which the initial idea of public interest emerged, is one that is concerned with a wholly Western and early 20th century democracy rather than a modern African, 21st century, infant democracy.

If we consider the traditional notions of public interest, then it could be argued that *The Sunday Times*, *City Press* and *You* were unfair in publishing, particularly at first, what can be only considered as rumour and gossip with regard to Pistorius' and Steenkamp's private lives. However, if one takes the line of de Backer and Fisher (2012), it could be argued that these salacious accounts were an important factor in demonstrating to the general public the consequences of deviant behaviour. More importantly, if one were to extend the idea that journalists in South Africa are working under an outdated and culturally stunted ethical paradigm, it becomes possible to argue that, in terms of good ethics, it's no wonder that these three publications have blurred the lines in regard to what is ethical and what is not.

Modern liberal journalism bases most of its ethical reasoning on John Stuart Mill's utilitarian adage: one must do that which benefits the greatest number of people. Put simply, if a journalist is required to damage the reputation of one individual in order to protect or enhance the lives of the many, it is ethical. Essentially, one is expected, under this paradigm, to maximise the happiness of society. However, as documented by Christians (2007), Mill was rather specific in his definition of happiness. Rather than considering pleasure and happiness as "mere sensation", Mill considered the "pleasures of intellect, of feeling and imagination, and of moral sentiments" (Christians, 2007:114) to be the true measure of the greatest good. However, Christians (2007:115) goes on to argue that "utilitarianism is intellectually appealing in the same way scientific theories are – a single principle constitutes all moral judgments. Utility requires an assessment of an action's consequences only, not the motives or character traits of the actor". Therefore, nothing is deemed to be unethical, merely the consequence of its intent, so murder, rape, and suicide are not necessarily right or wrong because their overall value is judged by their consequences.

Christians (2007:119) argues that such a framework is not viable in a medium so concerned with quick turnarounds and a profession that has been "pulled [...] away from its traditional role in facilitating democratic life" due to its dependence on global markets. If one examines the example of Steenkamp's murder, it is apparent that reporting the case in so much detail bears little benefit in line with furthering South Africa's democracy. Pistorius is not a figure who has any impact on the development of South African society, nor would his conviction or innocence change the day-to-day well-being of the average South African. In fact, the two long-term consequences of his trial that could have a greater bearing on South Africans is their faith in the legal system, and re-affirming assumptions regarding gender in the country. However, by picking sides as obviously as the three examples analysed below have done, it's difficult to argue that the media are considering the long-term effects of their actions. Christians (2007:113) goes so far as to argue that the "[m]odels of utilitarianism emphasizing long-term consequences would not be trapped in

the media's day-to-day quandaries" because it depends on assessing consequences correctly and the multitude of possibilities that could result from a specific action. Such measurement is difficult to gauge when one is faced with almost infinite interpretations and thus, almost infinite reactions and long-term considerations of readers.

The reality, according to Christians (2007:120), is that:

"In some media situations, consequences are a reliable guide. But in many of the most crucial issues we face at present, utility is not adequate – for understanding distributive justice, diversity in popular culture, violence in television and cinema, truth telling, digital manipulation, conflict of interest, and so forth. We face the anomaly that the ethical system most entrenched in the media industry is not ideally suited from resolving its most persistent headaches".

While journalists should indeed consider the consequence of their actions, and good reporting should be weighed up by its long-term effects, these should not be the only measures to be taken into account. If we consider the above cases in line with the importance of tabloid journalism and its usefulness in developing social culture, then the Steenkamp story could be argued to have important long-term benefits. However, if we consider the case from the ideals of traditional journalism, its long-term effects could hinder the progress of South Africa's newly formed democracy and judiciary. Therefore, when assessing the ethicality of a news item one needs to consider the principal function of the medium and the format of delivery being used. However, this creates problems in itself as most journalists, editors and academics are still loyal to a paradigm that considers the media as a social watchdog for the benefit of building a political democracy. In order to deal with this problem, one could argue in line with Christians (2007:119), who suggests that instead of "searching for neutral principles to which all parties can appeal, our ethical theory should rest on a complex view of moral judgments embedded in duty and thereby in society".

2. SOCIAL ETHICS OF DUTY

Ross argues that "[t]here are duties of justice that require us to ignore or even upset the balance of happiness" of the future in order to make the past right (Ross, 1930:21, cited in Christians, 2007:121). "Thus an ethics of duty is a more compelling model of decision making. It covers the entire time frame rather than only anticipating future effects" (Christians, 2007:121). This is an important point in a country like South Africa because in order for the country to move forward, certain past wrongs must be corrected. This ties back to Wasserman's (2006) argument in regard to the importance of tabloids to include a public that was once marginalised and excluded from public debate. One must consider that as a result of exclusion during apartheid, the only way for some voices to be heard was through their own personal stories. Therefore, it becomes apparent that a journalistic model based on dialogue and social interaction is of far greater importance to South African society than one rooted in an objective singular paradigm.

Christians (2007) offers three models of social duty, namely a discourse ethic, a feminist ethic and a communitarian ethic. However, as he suggests, all ethical considerations should be based on one's assessment of culture, society and time-frame, so we argue that in the South African context, the best way forward is to assess the above example by a social ethic rooted in communitarianism, as this framework acknowledges that "ethics is a shared process of discovery and interpretation [and, importantly] our obligation to sustain one another defines our existence" (Christians, 2007:125).

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to give attention to South African mainstream media coverage of the Steenkamp murder, three publications were chosen – two newspapers, the *Sunday Times* and *City Press* – and one tabloid-style magazine, *You*. The *Sunday Times* is South Africa's biggest Sunday newspaper, with paid circulation of 455,129 and readership figures of 3,733,000, and is renowned for its investigative nature. *City Press* is the country's second biggest national weekly newspaper, with paid circulation of 113,911 and readership of 1,996,000. *You* magazine, a weekly publication, is the country's biggest English language magazine, with a circulation of 142,981 and a readership figure of 2,215,000. An online search was conducted on *The Sunday Times* and *City Press* websites, and a content and discourse analysis conducted on the words, themes and images in articles written about Oscar Pistorius and Reeva Steenkamp, and an interpretative research paradigm was then undertaken. The period under scrutiny is 17 February 2013 to 3 March 2013 – the period after Steenkamp's murder and before Pistorius' first appearance in court. The findings were coded into categories which highlighted the types of words and images used to represent Pistorius and Steenkamp. In order to create reliable codes, Soanes' (2002) work on content analysis was used to determine which features of these elements were considered positive, negative or neutral. Positive words and phrases were those, for example, which were hopeful, favourable or confident, or expressed a basic degree of quality (for example, "brave"), while negative words or phrases were neither hopeful nor favourable, tended to lack positive attributes, or were apathetic or pessimistic. Words and phrases lacking any relevant descriptive purpose were considered neutral and discarded. The data collection was also noted how often Pistorius and Steenkamp were mentioned or pictured. These findings were then incorporated into a discussion surrounding the ethics of the representations created by the publications under examination.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Sunday Times

It is evident that the articles set up an archetypal narrative of, using Propp's (1968) terminology, a fallen hero and a princess. Reeva Steenkamp is mentioned far less often than Oscar Pistorius, but when she is represented, the researchers found more positively-loaded inferences than when compared to Pistorius. The newspaper created a deliberate dichotomy between the "stunningly beautiful", "glamorous", "model", "tragic beauty" of Steenkamp and

the “risky”, “risk-taking”, “dark-side” of Pistorius. Typically, Steenkamp was “sexualised” in her death, with glamorous modelling shots routinely accompanying related news stories (Liddiard, 2014, describes similar findings).

It becomes clear through this analysis that the *Sunday Times* deviated from the traditional tone of fair and balanced reporting by using emotionally loaded words like “angel”, “sweet”, “kind”, “loving”, and “tragic” to describe Steenkamp, the “victim of a heinous crime”. These words were reinforced by repeated photographs of Steenkamp in which she was pictured against a white background, looking back at the camera, creating the allusion of an angel “walking into the light”, looking back to say her “final goodbye”.

This representation of Steenkamp reinforces stereotypes that women are weak, subordinate creatures, and thus confines women to traditional beauty or sex oriented roles, as described by Kang (1997). The use of such words brings to the forefront the image of a victim or, as in a fairy tale, a “damsel in distress”. The newspaper chose to refer to her as a “model” and “girlfriend” more often than anything else and, even when describing her death, kept focus on what she wore and how she looked. Placing emphasis on Steenkamp’s body and constantly reinforcing stereotypes about women infers a weakness of self, or the inability to protect one’s self, and also draws greater sympathy from others. One can conclude that throughout the *Sunday Times* reporting, journalists oscillated between stereotypes of Steenkamp as a victim and as a sex object.

With regard to Oscar Pistorius, however, a mixture of both positively and negatively loaded phrases was used to describe him. It was interesting to note though, that the majority of positive terms were used in the past tense, such as “had courage”, “was successful”, and “was an amazing athlete”. It is important to note that when these articles were published, Pistorius had yet to be charged with anything, let alone premeditated murder. However, *The Sunday Times* articles were insistent and consistent in assuming both his guilt and premeditation. They were determined to cast him as the “fallen hero”.

The use of phrases such as “perp-walk” and “dark side” suggests that there is a side to Pistorius that had been hiding under his “hero façade” as a successful sports star. Words such as “premeditated” and “premeditation” were used frequently in both features and news stories, thus consistently implying that Steenkamp’s death was not an accident. Consequently, Pistorius was intentionally “cast” by journalists as the fallen hero.

The articles were explicit about Pistorius’ “wild past”, and re-affirmed patriarchal stereotypes of the white Afrikaans man by using words such as “alcohol”, “guns”, “speedster”, “risky”, “dangerous”, and “violent” to denote an aggressive Pistorius; all in high contrast to his “inspirational” and “heroic” image of the past. Interestingly, journalists chose to use phrases such as “betrayed” or “explosive fall from grace” to denote a sense of disappointment and hurt on behalf of the public, emotionally burdening readers to believe in Pistorius’ guilt. Liddiard (2014) and Harvey (2015) both discuss representations of Pistorius with regard to his disability, and both studies reinforce the findings of this paper.

4.2 *City Press*

The *City Press*, like *The Sunday Times*, represented the alleged murder of Steenkamp as the tragic tale of a fallen hero and his princess. However, unlike *The Sunday Times*, which relied on describing Pistorius' past and the emergence of his "dark side", *City Press* tended to highlight the athlete's undesirable social traits which allegedly had always been known by the public. Using words and phrases such as "vicious", "moody", "violent", and "favoured the gun", while acknowledging his "Olympic stardom", *City Press* creates the impression that Pistorius had always displayed his "dark side", but that South Africans, and the world, were willing to ignore these traits due to his "legendary" sporting status. Additionally, *City Press* tended to relate such characteristics to Pistorius' masculine nature, using phrases such as "a way with women", "machismo" and "manhood" to help explain his love for firearms and justify the numerous pictures published by the newspaper of him and blonde women.

However, one story focussed on how Pistorius used a herbal supplement (originally touted by newspapers to be an anabolic steroid) to increase his libido. Consequently, by focussing on Pistorius' need for this supplement which, according to the article, helped raise his testosterone levels, brings the authenticity of his masculinity into question. It could be argued that by publishing such a story the newspaper drew attention to the lack of one of the most basic characteristics of a "real" man – sexual ability. Therefore, while *City Press* was eager to highlight his "dangerous" side, unlike *The Sunday Times*, which focused on his violent nature as being part of his masculine identity, it tended to suggest that his "dark side" was in part fuelled by a faltered, or fallen masculinity.

Steenkamp, however, was represented as the epitome of heteronormative femininity. Throughout *City Press*' coverage, during the aftermath of her alleged murder, articles were used that highlighted Steenkamp's beauty, love of children and family-orientated nature. Words and phrases such as "family first", "pretty as a peach" and "beautiful" were the standard when mentioning the "popular model". Only once did the newspaper make reference to Steenkamp's law degree while simultaneously highlighting her "kindness" and "attractiveness", thus re-affirming that a woman's most important attributes are those which are orientated toward her looks and the home. As with *The Sunday Times*, *City Press* also tended to made reference to Steenkamp as "the girlfriend" more often than as a person in her own right. As argued by Liddiard (2014:1) "[Steenkamp was] not the core of the story", but instead was seen as a secondary participant by the media in a tragedy which saw Pistorius' fall from grace.

Consequently, *City Press*' coverage re-affirmed Steenkamp not only as the victim, but as the mythologised "damsel in distress" who could not be saved from Pistorius' "damaged" masculinity. The narrative implies that if Pistorius had possessed the "correct" characteristics of masculinity he would not have become the fallen hero, but would have risen to be the right type of masculine hero all women crave in traditional fairy-tales.

4.3 *You Magazine*

Similar representations are highlighted in a special edition of *You* magazine that ran at the beginning of March 2013 to coincide with Pistorius' bail application. One could be forgiven for thinking that the same journalists wrote the articles that appeared in *You* and in *The Sunday Times* and *City Press*, or, at the very least, shared the same thesaurus when writing. The terminology used to describe both victim and perpetrator in *The Sunday Times* was almost identical to those used in *You*. The issue seemed intent on painting Pistorius as a rage-fuelled character, while Steenkamp was seen as the angelic victim of an abusive lover.

You, like the *City Press*, also spent time unpacking Pistorius' history, insinuating that he had hidden a "dark side" behind his "golden boy" sporting image. They documented his well-known temper tantrums on the field, as well as his love for firearms; all of which implied that the South African public chose to ignore (or accept) his affinity for violence in favour of his heroics on the athletics track before the shooting of Steenkamp. The magazine manipulated readers further with an image of a seemingly remorseful and teary-eyed Pistorius on its cover – an image which, on closer inspection, was a carefully cut headshot of Pistorius on the training field dripping with water. The image alluded to a man who was regretful of his actions, but when read with the magazine's headline "RUINED" drew readers into the overwhelming tragedy and selfishness of Pistorius, who appeared to be mourning his now failed reputation more so than the death of Steenkamp; again, placing him in an unfavourable light with readers.

As with *The Sunday Times*, *You* spent far more time documenting and alluding to Pistorius' mental state than on the death of Steenkamp, as would be the norm for most news narratives of this nature. Her role, once again, seems somewhat peripheral to ensuring that readers know how far from his pedestal Pistorius has fallen. The magazine, which dedicated a 16-page spread to the saga, only had a half-page story on Reeva's family and the loss of their daughter. As with *The Sunday Times*, the story was mostly focused on her appearance and blossoming modelling career rather than her law degree or her charity work, dedicated, ironically, to helping women in abusive relationships.

5. CONCLUSION

The paper has explored the question: has the media played fair with their stereotyped representations of the Steenkamp murder? An interesting development concerning the press ombudsman is of interest here: on 24th August 2013 the press ombudsman ordered *Rapport* and its sister publication *City Press* to publish an apology for causing unnecessary harm to paralympian Oscar Pistorius. The two newspapers were also ordered to issue corrections on a story they published on 30 June 2013 which alleged that Pistorius was seen at a car dealership with an attractive blonde woman buying an Audi R8, Press Ombudsman Johan Retief said. This article has not considered the concept of harm and journalistic ethics explicitly, though this would be a useful piece of research to undertake at a later date, but the impact that the

representation of Steenkamp and Pistorius had on the framing of the narrative. The Press Ombudsman's finding once again highlights the inherent bias in the way that Pistorius and Steenkamp were represented in relation to their masculinity and femininity respectively. Clearly, public perception would be drawn to the similarities between Pistorius' female companion and Steenkamp, with a story implying that the athlete had returned to his outward displays of machismo as he purchases a fast car with another model-like beauty looking on. This story seems to reference many of the stereotypes that emerged about Pistorius during the initial period after Steenkamp's murder – a man who "had a way with woman" and liked to show off his wealth with traditionally masculine accessories such as cars and firearms. Consequently, we suggest that the tabloid-broadsheet debate is very pertinent to the analysis conducted in this paper. As already highlighted, some have argued that the gossipy style of tabloid reporting diminishes the quality of public discourse (Froneman, 2005), but we believe that this is too superficial a point to make. Instead, we posit that representing gender in the stereotyped ways highlighted in each of the investigated publications leads back to the importance of gossip, as suggested by Backer and Fisher (2012). However, we also conclude that the use of stereotypes and gossip undermines both a traditional utilitarian ethic and an ethic of duty, as outlined by Christians (2007).

If one returns to the considerations regarding the impact that social media has had on journalism, it becomes evident that newspapers have had to adopt certain characteristics of social media in order to stay relevant to their audiences (Dawes, 2013 in De Waal, 2013). One such trait is social media's affinity for the circulation of quick information most often founded on rumour and gossip. It can be argued that this feature has found its newspaper home in tabloids. Backer and Fisher (2012) and Jones and Pitcher (2015) both argue that gossip can be useful for the development of society as it allows one to highlight the consequences of deviant behaviour. In part, the case studies under analysis demonstrated that violent behaviour leads to the fall of even those considered to be "legends" in society. Additionally, by utilising gendered stereotypes, these articles also give readers insight into how dominant society expects men and women to behave, as suggested in the work of Perkins (1979). The *City Press* articles which stressed Pistorius' "faulty" masculinity, and *The Sunday Times*' and *You* magazine's allegations of steroid use, helped to emphasise that if one does not maintain a "natural" gender-state it could lead to one's self-destruction, as was the case with Pistorius.

However, if one considers the ethics of these reports in line with traditional notions of utilitarian ethics, there are both positives and negatives to take away from such representations. Firstly, as was described earlier, there are limitations to applying utilitarianism to modern journalism because it deals with the consequences of action (Christians, 2007). As argued, the publication of these stories held no long-term value for South African society, and thus was unethical. However, one could argue that the social consequences of these articles have merit and therefore are in fact ethical to print. Problematically though, the representations portrayed in these examples could offer two distinct consequences:

- Re-affirming Western heteronormative gender roles in South African society, and
- Undermining those individuals who do not conform to such roles.

Consequently, by using traditional journalistic ethics one is faced with what could be argued as a positive and negative consequence. Society is given guidance on how to act, but simultaneously does not offer space to those who do not conform to such an ideology. Therefore, as was proposed earlier we found it best to measure these news reports in line with an ethic of duty – communitarianism.

Using this paradigm, the consequence of such representations is not as relevant, because it becomes more important that they are considered a tool for community building. Therefore, like gossip, communitarianism highlights that it is only when communities share information (even if it is undesirable) that a society is able to debate its relevance. Accordingly, by highlighting Steenkamp and Pistorius in gender performative roles *The Sunday Times*, *City Press* and *You*, demonstrated South Africa's preoccupation with heteronormative ideals. This shows that South Africa's media, ironically, are far more likely to perpetuate dominant ideology than perform the role of a watchdog in which they counter the dominant discourse of those in power.

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