

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Gender, photojournalism and ethics

Key issues

- Photojournalism needs to develop ethical principles to address bias and inequality in gender portrayal.
- These need to take into consideration all those involved in the process of image creation.



HIV/AIDS activists in Thembisa, Johannesburg.

Introduction

The earlier sections of this manual explored how photojournalism contributes to, helps to reinforce, and form our perceptions of gender. This final section begins a discussion on how we can challenge the gender biases and inequalities that so often dominate these perceptions.

This brings us to discuss that highly contested area for any journalist: ethics. Every ethical question in photojournalism has a major gender dimension. Key areas include:

- Defining “us” and “them”; objectifying the other;
- Naming, shaming and blaming;
- Labelling for sex and gender as the basis for stereotyping;
- Faking, staging and manipulation;
- The role of the reporter in observing and intervention in violence
- Embedding.

This is not a completely new debate. Southern Africa has developed its own traditions of photojournalism (see Chapter 3, on the history of gender and images in the region.) Southern Africa’s documentary photography has imaged the lives of oppressed and neglected communities through the nascent black press, linking social documentary images to growing literacy, urbanisation, and – in South Africa – resistance to apartheid.

This photojournalism tradition engaged with issues around race similar to those on gender, including stereotyping, “blindness”, labelling, and reinforcement of the status quo.

Defining “us and them”

Earlier in this manual, we looked at how gender often underpins how a person defines who is “us” or who is “them”. This has critical implications for how we respond to people and events, and how we portray those events.

Professional photographers have traditionally been men. Many of the conventions around photographing women have therefore treated women as objects within potential pictures, for the man behind the camera to “shoot”.

We need to address this “us and them”. On the one hand we need to correct the dominant actuality, that photographers are men. We need to erase the stereotype that enforces that reality. But we also need to break down the visual traditions that treat women as objects for the man-behind-the camera to shoot.

Naming, blaming, and shaming

Often, the photographer deliberately names, blames and shames. Frequently, merely naming a person who is involved – even if clearly named as the victim – will feed into gender inequalities and prejudices. For example, if the conventional wisdom is that, “a raped women probably asked for it”, those responsible for illustrating such a story may look for a picture of the victim that fits this notion, for example, elements of her dress.

Any recognisable image may encourage people to point fingers, especially when they are ready to discriminate. There are many situations where the perpetrator is unknown, or protected by law. The journalist wants to come up with details to feed an avidly interested audience. Often the person who suffered – and who is looking for redress – is more likely to publicise the problem. The photographer provides an identifiable image.

Photographers face particular problems in recording events of this nature. As a rule of thumb, photographer’s should:

- Ask permission to publish any information about the person, especially names and identifying details including recognisable features; always get the permission; always make sure the person

is aware of the potential problems with publicity; if possible get the “victim” to review the work pre-publishing to see the context in which it will appear.

- Think carefully about labelling and context for any pictures, especially of victims.

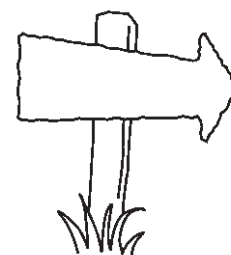
Exercise: Masking identity?

Examine the three images in **Handout forty-two** Which do you think succeeds in masking identity? Which do you think conveys sensitivity towards the subject?



Training tips: In the first two instances, an attempt is made to blot out identity using blobs and lines. Apart from the fact that neither succeeds (it would be quite easy in these communities to identify the victims) there is a crassness and insensitivity in the way the images are used. In the third case (a counselling session) the photo is taken from behind. Even if it were possible to identify the person being photographed (which is less likely than in the other two cases) the spotlight is on the care-giver. It is a photograph framed with compassion, with the posters in the background giving added context and meaning.

Chapter Eight: Making and taking pictures



Labelling and “tagging” becomes a basis for stereotyping

Stereotyping defines a person (or object or event) by placing them in a category. Often, a recognisable characteristic becomes the “label” on the image, telling the viewer what they will find inside the package. Journalist ethics regularly warn writers and communicators of the dangers of using “codes” – applying a label that tells the viewer the wrong information. With visual images, especially around areas as stereotyped as gender, and where gender stereotypes link to race, class, and ethnic codes, these labels can be a serious problem.

Some labels open the person to blame. As was mentioned earlier, a person who is “not in my group” is automatically considered blame-worthy. The very fact of public suffering provides a label that says: “after all, those people ask for it, deserve it and expect it”. This applies to people with AIDS, victims of domestic violence and rape, rape of lesbians, sexual harassment at work and so on. The list includes those on the receiving end of practically all acts done to maintain an oppressive gender imbalance.

Labelling for sex and gender

Showing blatant sexual characteristics, and “sexual markers” in photographs are far more common in pictures about women rather than men. This “tagging” leads to stereotyping. It often leads to discrimination. It also adds to the “objectification” of women’s bodies.

Exercise: Is this relevant?

Examine the two sets of images in **Handout forty-three**. In what ways do they draw attention away from the person and towards the physical attributes of the two women? How could these images have been presented differently?



Training tip: The first case drew a barrage of public outcry in Namibia, mainly because of the image showing the axe. The editor argued that the image was intended to draw attention to the issue through its shock value. None of the debate picked up on the gross insensitivity of showing the dead woman’s uncovered body, with the black strip that inevitably accentuates rather than hides this feature. Even if one argues for the use of this photo, it could easily have been cropped at the shoulders. In the second instance, Freda Adams is suing the ex-premier of the Western Cape for sexual harassment. The fact that she was once a local beauty queen bears absolutely no relevance to the story. Notice how these images are deliberately juxtaposed to give the impression that she enticed the ex- premier and is therefore to blame.



handout forty-two

Masking identity?

I NEVER HAD SEX WITH PRISONER

BY INNOCENT MAPHALALA
Matsapha – Describing her much-publicised scandal about allegedly being caught having sexual intercourse with a prisoner as a stain in her otherwise blameless life, Sandra Mncwango* could only say: "I couldn't have done it."

She is convinced that the story was created by people who wanted to destroy her for reasons she is not aware of.

The 33-year-old Sandra believes that God will stand by her throughout this ordeal. She was allegedly caught in an uncompromising position with a male prisoner at the Matsapha Maximum Security prison.

They are said to have been found making passionate love inside Sandra's staff house. Initial reports were that she had been having an affair with the convict for some time before her superiors caught the two of them in the act.

As a result of this incident, she was allegedly transferred to the Mawelawela Women's Correctional facility in Luyengo.

When the Swazi News traced her to her new home – outside the maximum-security prison premises, Sandra appeared at ease with herself.

"I have been reading the newspapers with interest since this issue became public," she said. "I have even collected all of them as evidence for future use because I didn't do

what I'm alleged to have done. I couldn't have slept with a prisoner."

Advancing her reasons for this, she said for one, the two-bedroom house she lived in was always teeming with people. She lived with her two adult cousins and several children.

Herself a mother of three children, Sandra said the people she lived with were always in the house. They stayed there throughout the day. The adults were not employed and only the children would go to school and get back at round midday.

"Secondly, I shared the house with another female officer. It would have been very difficult for me to sleep with a prisoner under these circumstances," she said.

She also explained that convicts were not allowed inside officers' houses.

The prisoner she is said to have had sex with would only work outside Sandra's house. He usually worked in the garden, which was not a peculiar case, as most officers enlist the assistance of prisoners to take care of their gardens.

However, Sandra admitted that the prisoners sometimes get into the house to repair appliances like stoves, television sets and radios.

These are prisoners who are qualified in this trade, which is also taught in prison.

The Swazi News gathered that normally, female officers are not supposed to talk to male prisoners unless a male warder is present.

This rule has not been adequately enforced of late and both convicts and officers have been taking advantage of the laxity. The female officers, for instance, talk to male prisoners from time to time.

They may ask them to do certain tasks for them and pay them something in return. This is usually bread or cigarette.

Sandra admitted that she had been somewhat used to having this particular prisoner work for her but vehemently denied that they were close.

"He was like all the other prisoners to me," she said.

The accused officer was reluctant to comment further, saying as a member of the disciplined forces, she was taught never to say anything pertaining to her work without the commissioner's authority.

Throughout the interview, she was careful not to overstep her bounds and delve deep into work-related issues.

She understood, however, that this matter – which she repeatedly said was a creation – was a personal one, which had dented her image in society.

She has even switched off her cell phone to

FEMALE WARDER DENIES SHE WAS CAUGHT IN THE ACT WITH A PRISONER

avoid calls from friends and relatives who have heard about the story.

"I have been receiving calls from as far as England," she said.

She was also concerned that he transfer had been portrayed as punishment measure to discipline her for what she allegedly did.

This was far from the truth, she said. Sandra explained that she had asked for a transfer from the Matsapha facility because she wanted to explore other avenues related to her work. Since joining the force in 1993, she had been doing industrial work and had never worked with prisoners serving their sentences. This is the experience she wanted to expose herself to. She is now happy where she is as she is looking after female prisoners who are serving their sentences.

While declining to reveal further details, Sandra promised that her time to tell the truth would come. She said she was presently looking and listening at what others are saying about her. When her time comes, the truth will be known.

He used the Siswati idiom, "Lisina muva liyabukwa" (He who laughs last, laughs longest). She said she would continue to keep her ears on the ground until she decides that the time is ripe for her to speak out.

*Not her real name



Female warder denies she was caught in the act with a prisoner.

Swazi News, 14 September 2001.

Girl, 16, gives magistrate her definition of sex



STAFF REPORTER

USAKOS: Thursday, January 17

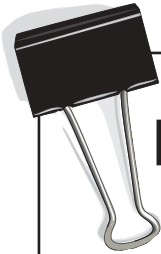
The eldest of two young white girls of notoriety in this town shuffled uncomfortably today while being cross-examined by Mr Piet Hamman a Swakopmund lawyer who appeared for Abraham Brink, 45.

Left, Mr Abraham Brink, 45 who walked out of the Usakos court on Thursday afternoon, a free man. He was accused of sex with the girl seen far left when she was still under the age of 16. She has in the meantime turned 16. The centre photograph, of the younger sister who too, implicated by members of the Usakos community as going around to sell herself for money.

Windhoek Observer

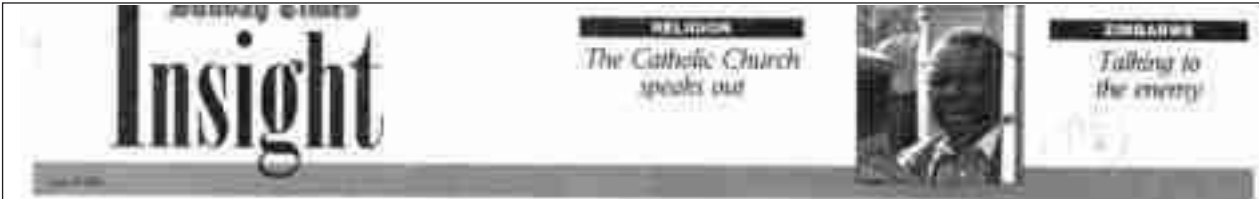


HIV AIDS counselling centre, Marondera, Zimbabwe
Photo by Trevor Davies



handout forty-three

Is this relevant?



Playing them at their own game

Feda Adams gained her street smarts from the very politicians she has now taken to court, writes EDWIN LOMBARD



FREDA Adams stands straight as a rod in the witness box, speaking in a clear, unwavering voice and meeting the judge's gaze. Dressed formally in a grey-striped, two-piece outfit with patterned scarf, she looks composed and prim. But her voice rises an octave as she recounts a Western Cape government Cabinet meeting in George and an encounter with one of her colleagues.

"He said: 'We are men and we are lustful and we want your room number,'" recounts Adams to the court.

It's a dramatic moment in a trial for which Adams, a former Western Cape Welfare MEC, has waited three years. She is claiming damages against her erstwhile colleagues, Peter Marais and Gerald Morkel, who have both been mayor of Cape Town and premier of the Western Cape.

She is suing Marais for R12-million and Morkel for R500 000. She claims Marais sexually harassed her and that Morkel claimed she was mentally unstable.

Adams insists the case is not about money. She says she is on a moral crusade, fighting for abused women everywhere. "I'm doing this for all the women in this country who have been sexually harassed and humiliated by men," she insists.

But Marais and Morkel believe this sordid sunset to their political careers is more about revenge.

Marais's advocate, Anwar Albertus, accuses Adams in court of conducting a "malicious vendetta" against Marais and taking revenge on the New National Party.

For many observers, the case is a final curtain for three people at centre stage in the sleazy soap opera that until recently defined Western Cape politics.

Marais is now fighting for his political life. In a last gasp, he recently started his own political party, the New Labour Party, after an unimpeachable scandal led to his being ousted as premier and from the NNP.

Besides the latest lawsuit, he is also under investigation by the Scorpions with former colleague David Malasi, for alleged fraud for allegedly receiving party donations from a developer.

The story is similar for Morkel, one of Marais's bitter enemies. He is now an ordinary Democratic Alliance city councillor, having lost his mayorship, premiership, DA leadership and post on the city council's executive committee. His fall began with a public hearing into his involvement with German swindler Jürgen Harkens.

Today, Morkel and Marais share a bench in the court, still not talking to each other but jointly defending their tattered reputations against Adams. Adams is an unlikely champion of women's rights. A former beauty queen, she rose from obscurity into the inner circle of the political elite in the Western Cape. She came out of nowhere as a school principal to win a seat as a National Party candidate on the Helderberg council in 1996.

A former mayor of Somerset West, Leon Deacon, knew Adams both inside te party and on the council: "I knew her as a very dedicated councillor. She put everything into her work. She was an achiever and if she got stuck into something she gave it her everything."

That determination to get ahead had seen Adams, then Freda Love, crowned Miss Western Province in 1964. Paging through an old photo album, Adams recalls a time when she turned heads as she strutted the ramps at township community halls.

"I was a very slender girl. I had all the right curves," she says, recalling how she had resisted early invitations to enter beauty pageants.

"Miss Western Cape Province was my first competition. I was the first contestant, and I won. Everything that I have done for the first time I have won," she says, making a point about her



current court action. "When I stood as councillor for the first time I took the ward from the DP. My father always used to say: 'Freda, you are never a loser.' These days I think of my father a lot.

"My father always said that I'd never lost a fight because I played honest."

She produces a big black-and-white photo showing her as an 18-year-old in a bathing costume with a sash draped around her. It is from another beauty pageant she won, Miss Graceville 1964, held in the slave mission station of Genadendal.

Sitting in her marbled dining room with her husband, John, Adams insists the case against Marais and Morkel has nothing to do with political ambition. She called the suggestion "an infamous lie" when it was put to her in court.

But she is no stranger to the dirty realities of the political game. She entered the big league when she joined Morkel's Cabinet in 1998.

Adams said in court that she had acted as Morkel's eyes and ears, informing him of the moves his own colleagues were making against him. Morkel believed colleagues, including Marais, were plotting to unseat him as provincial NNP leader.

In 2000 she had informed him that a "palace coup" was to be staged for his position as leader of the NNP in the Western Cape.

Morkel was in Beijing at the time and cut his visit short to defend his position at the party congress that followed.

Persuaded by party supporters, Adams threw her name in the hat for deputy leader, along with Marais, Erik van Deventer and Martin Ockers. To everyone's surprise, she garnered an impressive 24 votes.

As she points to the numerous photos on the walls of her Somerset West home, she says everything fell apart for her when she went to Morkel with her allegations of sexual harassment against Marais. Morkel, she says, turned a deaf ear to her complaints.

She describes an incident in Marais's office in August 11 1999, before a meeting of a Cabinet committee. Marais allegedly told her: "You know,



A sad and terrible death

Meme Helena Gabriel who was fatally axed by her grandson on Monday while she was sleeping at her homestead in Ombalayambwenge village. The Police found the elderly woman with the axe still embedded in her head. She was allegedly killed for her pension money. See report below.

* OSWALD SHIVUTE

AN 85 year-old woman was axed to death by her grandson, on Monday night so that he could steal her pension money, the Police said yesterday.

Helena Gabriel died from a head wound. She was struck with an axe while she was sleeping in her hut at her homestead in the Ombalayambwenge village in the Oshikato Region.

The Police have arrested Gabriel's 21-year-old grandson, Hosea 'King' Angola, for the horrific crime. He is due to appear in the Ondangwa Magistrate's Court this morning on a murder charge.

Police Liaison Officer in the North, Sergeant Samwel Hamukonda, said Angola had confessed that he killed his grandmother and said he had done it because he needed her pension money.

Hamukonda told The Namibian that Angola allegedly took NS500 from the old woman, of which NS400 was found on him when he was arrested yesterday.

Angola was taken into custody after his friend suspected he committed the crime, and went to the Ondangwa Police Station.

Early yesterday morning, Anglo apparently went to his friend Nambala Simon Elifas and asked him to take him to Omuthiyagwiipundi, approximately 90 kilometres from Ombalayambwenge, to do some business.

The Namibian 30 January 2002

Freda, if I look at you and smell your perfume, then I could undress you."

Marais has denied all allegations of sexual harassment and impropriety. Still to testify in the case, He has filed a counter-claim against Adams for R2.5-million for defamation related to her sexual harassment claims.

Adams's fall has been as rapid as her rise. She says she was forced to resign from the NNP in October last year and lost her position as a

member of the Western Cape legislature.

Her experience in the thick of provincial politics has, however, blooded her in the street-fighting ways of the Western Cape.

Adams, 59, may have taught young girls how to act like beauty queens when she was owner of a modelling school, but she has not been shy to trade punches in her crusade to defend her reputation.

She has sold most of her furniture and her house

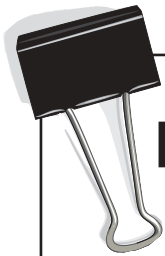
is on the market to raise money for her legal costs.

Abraham Adams, a former school principal and long-time friend of hers, describes her attitude to life as "contagious".

"She is overflowing with enthusiasm. But she is not the type of women you make overtures to. I think some men feel threatened by her or want to demoralise her."

Adams insists her court action is not about winning or losing but about getting her account of

Playing them at their own game
29 June 2003



handout forty-four

Checklist- blatant sexual characteristics

When images include blatant sexual characteristics, try asking the following questions

1. Are blatant sexual characteristics relevant?

In stories dealing directly with sex, sexual characteristics may be important to the message conveyed by the image. But in a story about women working in the mines, sexual characteristics may take away from the import of the photograph (for instance, where the message is that the person is doing a dirty, physically difficult job). A model showing off a business suit does not need to be bare-breasted underneath it; indeed in many companies such a display might get the woman who wore the suit to an office job fired on the spot.

2. How are sex and gender explained – in the picture, the context, or the packaging? How will your audience react to, or understand that explanation?

Viewers often respond to “culturally – charged” issues like sex and gender with very different interpretations. If sex or gender is a part of the image’s message, will it be “read” as the photographer assumed it would? Are explanations in the context, packaging, or words around the picture adequate and effective?



3. Does the image feed into gendered stereotypes and codes?

For instance, a woman in deliberately revealing clothing is thought to be “easy”, “asking for sex” (or selling it). Often, coded images may directly contradict the message intended.

4. Are sexual markers used evenly?

One simply way to determine the gender implications of an image is to ask what would happen if the person shown belonged to the other sex. Would the implications of, and reactions to, the image change dramatically?

5. Ask someone who knows what it feels like.

It is always safer when imaging someone from the “them” group to get a response to the image from a member of that group. It is even better if the subject themselves sees and agrees with the image – although this may not always be possible.

“Setting-up” vs. “faking”

This leads in turn to a perennial problem around “setting up” shoots. At what point does it become a “faked” picture – one that would not or did not happen naturally, so the photographer got the subjects to do it for the camera?

In real life, photographers “set up” many kinds of photographs as a matter of course – especially when promoting positive images, whether of politicians, fashion models, rock stars, or the bride in a wedding. In these situations, it is assumed that the photographer will look for the best background; will tell the bride her bra-strap is showing; will go for “the best side” of a person’s face. In fashion shoots, complicated sets are designed to convey the precisely right atmosphere. Many of these “acceptable” set-ups cover gendered images.

In news photos, this is considered less than acceptable – although it is standard practice to ask your subject to move a little to get in better light.

Exercise: Is this just a set up?

Discuss the following scenarios. Were either of these pictures “set up” or “faked”? Should the pictures have been used by the publication if they were “set up”?

a) A photographer in Zimbabwe goes to get pictures of people taking food from a shop in wheelbarrows during a food riot. The riot was over when they arrived on the scene. They asked some people standing by to load up a wheel-barrow with goods, so they could get that particular picture.



Picture used in Echoes, 13 June 2002.

b) Students at the Polytechnic of Namibia are doing a story on sex work for their community journalism newspaper. None of the sex workers want to be photographed. So they set up a shoot (see above). When cropping the picture they decide not to show the woman’s legs.



Training tips: These are some of the grey areas of photojournalism. What happens if we are too late, or the subjects do not want to be photographed? Notice that in the second case the students showed sensitivity in that they wanted to project the business like nature of sex work, rather than the sexual attributes of the woman. But should the caption have mentioned that this was a set up? This, some would argue, would be a reasonable compromise, as a story of this nature would not grab attention without some form of illustration.

Choosing and promoting, versus faking, staging, and manipulation

There are a myriad of choices in making, reproducing, and reading images. In a contested area such as gender, the dividing lines as to which types of choice are acceptable and which are not need to be continually examined and questioned.

One key question is to what extent the image-maker should promote gender-balanced images and images that challenge stereotypes in a society which is inequitable. Does the photographer take responsibility for showing all points of view, even when a point of view is the exception.



Gally Kambeu's photo of woman and man working together on a water project. Do you think this photo was a set up?

Observing, reporting and intervention in violence

The photojournalist's role is idealised as distant and "objective". But too often this is taken to mean "value-free". At times it is built into the photojournalist's assignment that they will not attempt to interfere in the subject matter whatever the ethical implications.

This may not be appropriate in cases of oppression, discrimination, violence, and the violation of human rights. Indeed, it can become an overwhelming problem for the photographer.

The alternative view, that of the "committed" journalist, proposes that the person "recording" has clearly decided their own position, and recognises that their "objectivity" in terms of fairly and equitably reporting on events does not mean they should attempt to stand "value-free" or indifferent to human tragedy before them.

Embedding

Recently, a phenomenon called "embedding journalists" has become a common practice, especially for international television and camera crews. "Embedded journalism" has had major implications for the portrayal of gender in photo-imagery.



Sunday Times, 30 March 2003.

In the 2003 war on Iraq, journalists – including photographers – travelled with Western troops. The press called this "embedding". News agencies – such as Reuters and CNN used "embedded" journalists as their main, and sometimes exclusive, source of images.

Placing journalists with one side of a conflict is not unusual. In conflict situations, journalists are likely to access the site with the assistance of, or at least the acknowledgement of, one of the sides to the conflict. But "embedding" raises questions about who chooses where the photographer goes, or what they photograph. Who chooses the "us" and "them"? Who determines what events, out of

the range of issues, events, and happenstance, will become the successful picture? The debates around "embedding" should include how this perpetuates gender bias.

Exercise: For and against

Divide the class into two and moderate a debate for and against embedding. What are the gender dimensions of the practice, especially in a war situation?



Training tips: Travelling with soldiers removes reporters from the ground where the real impact of war is felt, especially by women and children.

Plain lies or getting it wrong:

In Botswana, *Mmegi* newspaper put a face photo of a man against one of the few women MPs in its annual report card on members of parliament in December 2001.



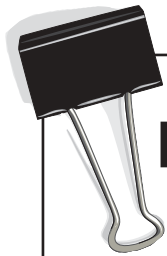
Lesego Motsumi cares about the people, especially the workers who are exploited by the employers. an articulate man.

Grade C+

EXERCISE: Have you noticed serious inaccuracies in your local publications? Are they more frequently wrong about women?



Training tip: In the case of *Mmegi*, an interesting question is whether the newspaper would have made the same mistake with a male politician.



handout forty-five

Photojournalism, gender and ethics- possible guidelines

- Avoid labelling identity (in terms of sex and gender); it stigmatises and does not support a culture of equality.
- Create and nurture a “visual language of tolerance, diversity and equality” in the media.
- Deepen both the journalist’s and the audience’s understanding of the context (historical, social, political economic) out of which a story emerges as well as the context into which it is reported.
- Consult constitutional frameworks and resulting legislation. Journalists should make it their business to be familiar with these frameworks and legislation.
- Build capacity in newsrooms and journalism training institutions by running training courses deal with issues of gender and sexism in the media.
- Avoid coded information in news which is perceived as reinforcing sexism in the media. This needs to be challenged and modified.
- Be careful of over classifying news into “beats”.
- Recognise and advance the advisory role of the media and its capacity to assist communities in understanding social and economic problems.
- Explore the link between gender and other issues. Relations of power within the media have to be thought through within the paradigms of gender, but also of race and class.

(These guidelines have been adopted from points made about the portrayal of race and racism in the media, from the Global Narratives of Race conference, Centre for the Book in Cape Town; Dec 2000. Rhodes Journalism Review p. 59, Aug 2001. The words “sexism and gender” have been substituted for “race and racism” throughout)

General Media Ethics

Seek truth and report it as fully as possible

- Inform yourself continuously so you can in turn inform, engage and educate the public in a clear and compelling way on significant issues.
- – Be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting accurate information.
- Give voice to the voiceless.
- Hold the powerful accountable.

Act independently

- Guard vigorously the essential stewardship role a free press plays in an open society.
- -seek out and disseminate competing perspectives without being unduly influenced by those who would use their power or position counter to the public interest.
- Remain free of associations and activities that may compromise your integrity or damage your credibility.
- -recognise that good ethical decisions require individual responsibility enriched by collaborative efforts.

Minimise harm

- Be compassionate for those affected by your actions.
- Treat sources, subjects and colleagues as human beings deserving of respect, not merely as means to your journalistic ends.
- Recognise that gathering and reporting information may cause harm or discomfort, but balance those negatives by choosing alternatives that maximise your goal of truth telling.

Bob Steele, Poynter Institute