

Give us each day our daily sexism

My attention was caught one Wednesday in May by a front page full-size headline in a newspaper: Dog has sex with woman. Was I reading the *Advertiser* or *Observer*, with their usual fare of sex and murder? No, this was *Namibia Today* going into a detailed description of how a woman was forced by four men to suffer penetration by a dog while photos were taken for the pornography markets in Europe.

Despite the fact that it was also mentioned that the woman wanted to commit suicide after this act of physical and psychological violence, the way in which the article was presented, was just as pornographic as the photos that were taken.

What difference does it make to the reader whether he looks at such photos or reads the headline "Dog has sex with woman" and uses his own imagination to get the picture? I refer to the reader as male purposely, as it is clearly directed to attract the attention of the male readership.

The recipe to increase newspaper sales is simple: combine the terms 'sex' and 'woman' or 'girl' into a headline, regardless of the content that follows. Once the reader has bought the newspaper he can then read the 'true story'.

And so women and girls are turned into the objects of male fantasy in four to five short words printed large on the page. Ironically, two weeks before this headline, *Namibia Today* ran a front-page report on a speech delivered by MP Pashukeni Shoombé wherein she called for an end to violence, including sexual violence against women and children.



As if to take up the challenge of *Namibia Today*, the *Namibian* followed the next day with its headline: More politics than sex at girls school. The same mechanism applied; combine the word 'sex' with female and imprint the image into male heads. That is what girls are for, isn't it? Even if in this particular instance they seemed to be more into politics.

The article itself couldn't be called pornographic as it came up with nothing more than unsubstantiated rumours. But so what, it helped to sell the newspaper.

Having previously taken *Namibia Today* and *The Namibian* to be champions on human rights issues, and even purporting to support the interests of women, I am left wondering how long it will take before journalists and editors (including women in the profession!) begin to take a real stand against the abuse of women in the area of sexual violence, fantasized or real, in their newspapers.

Women and girls are not only forced to sell themselves in times of poverty and unemployment to the pornography industry, to sex tourism and prostitution; we are all being sold daily, against our will, in such newspaper headlines. ■