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A critical analysis of the *Chronicle and Sunday News*' portrayal of gays and lesbians.

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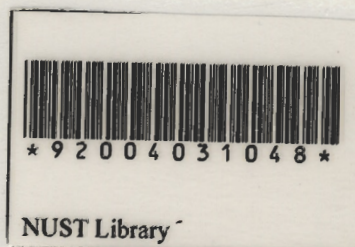
Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the Bsc Degree in Journalism and Media Studies of the National University of Science and Technology (NUST).

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April 2011

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## ABSTRACT

The end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed an increase in the number of gays and lesbians liberation movements calling for their inclusion in the mainstream society through the passing of legislations legalising homosexuality. However, the movements faced stiff resistance from heterosexuals largely accepted by religion, culture and tradition. The rise of the gays and lesbians liberation movements has presented challenges to the media to either hold aloft professional journalistic standards of mirroring society and offering a platform for all social groups including gays and lesbians to report their side of the story or to take sides with heterosexuals. The Zimbabwean society is largely influenced by homophobic religious and cultural values. On the other hand, the media is empowered by law to report both positive and negative homosexuality stories.

The research answers how the *Chronicle* and *Sunday News* have reacted to gays and lesbians' calls and the appeals by homophobic social groups and individuals calling for the criminalisation of homosexuality. To achieve this, the researcher employed participant observation as one of the three data collection techniques and spent five months frequenting gays and lesbians surroundings pretending to be gay while at the same time observing their interaction with the *Chronicle* and *Sunday News*. The analysis of the *Chronicle* and *Sunday News*' portrayal of gays and lesbians is grounded on the standards of journalism of neutrality, balance and impartiality and the normative functions of the media namely public sphere, representation, education and informing.

The main thrust of the research is to find out how, when and in what ways gays and lesbians enter the media space (*Chronicle* and *Sunday News*) and the images they are portrayed in those circumstances. The research uncovers factors influencing the two publications' portrayal of gays and lesbians and the implications of the portrayals. Representation is an essential point of interrogation as it influences the manner in which society views gays and lesbians. It is against this backdrop that the research critically analyses the role played by the *Chronicle* and *Sunday News* in shaping the identity of gays and lesbians.