

**US and Them: loveLife, Commercial  
Brands and Everyday Life  
Masters Degree Dissertation**

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**201511524**

**June 2007**

## **Declaration**

I, Richard Cecil Delate, hereby declare that this dissertation, submitted for the Masters Degree in Cultural and Media Studies at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, is entirely my own work, with the exceptions of those references acknowledged in the text.

Signed:



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

There are many people who need to be thanked who encouraged me all the way through this journey. Firstly, I would like to thank the young people that participated in this study. I hope that they learnt as much as I did.

I would also like to thank the management of loveLife who initially provided much information and collaboration on this project.

I thank, Professor Keyan Tomaselli and Professor Ruth Teer-Tomaselli for their guidance and encouragement and to my supervisor Dr Warren Parker, for making the time and effort available to support this study. A special word of appreciation and acknowledgement to Professor Sonya Narunsky-Laden who provided much guidance and reading materials on issues relating to consumption theory. Much thanks to the staff at Dramaide - in particular Mkhonzeni Gumede - who helped setting up the focus groups for this study in KwaZulu-Natal, and Nicolette Solomon, who helped to set up the focus groups in Gauteng and helped moderate the groups.

I also thank Mark Stirling and all my former colleagues at UNAIDS, who provided a lot of encouragement in completing this thesis.

The following people also need to be thanked for their support: Hayley Reid for helping in sourcing publications and journal articles without whom very little of this would have been possible; my sister Jacqueline Duarte, my former partner Dominic Liber and the rest of my family and friends who provided a lot of encouragement and moral support at times when all hope of finishing this thesis had faded and who must be relieved that they will never have to hear the word “loveLife” again! If there is anyone I have left out, thank you to you too!

## **Abstract**

The issue of branding with regard to public health communication is the topic of this thesis. The case study investigated is that of the loveLife Lifestyle brand introduced to South Africa in 1999 by the US-based Henry J Kaiser Family Foundation. loveLife brought together the collective efforts of a consortium of NGOs concerned with adolescent reproductive health in South Africa with the primary objective of reducing the rate of new HIV infections, sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy through promoting a healthy lifestyle approach using traditional commercial marketing techniques.

This study draws upon the Circuit of Culture to explore the manner in which the meaning of the loveLife lifestyle brand discourse is constructed, produced, distributed and consumed through using a semiotic approach.

To achieve this the study explores the meanings represented by loveLife through examining the images and texts from the television and radio programmes, outdoor media; print publications and public relations produced by loveLife. The manner in which these meanings were produced by loveLife as articulated in various policy documents. It explores how young people aged 12 – 17 from different socio-economic backgrounds consume and make meaning of the loveLife brand and use these in everyday life to express meaning about themselves in their social interaction and how carceral networks of power comprising parents, religious groups and AIDS organizations have sought to regulate the meaning and social identities that arise from the representation of the brand.

The study concludes that the representation of the loveLife lifestyle brand has given rise to a brand identity that positions adolescent sexuality as something that is cool and that everyone is engaged in. This representation has been the result of a deliberate brand strategy by loveLife that has sought to encourage more open discussions between parents and youth on issues relating to sex and sexuality. The unintentional

consequence arising from this representation is that in their consumption of the meanings of loveLife, loveLife's interpersonal facilities are decoded by others in the community as being spaces that encourage sexual interaction by young people. Young people who attend these facilities are by implication decoded as being sexually active. This undermines the intention of the producers of creating spaces where young people can engage and interact in a variety of recreational activities including learning about sexual and reproductive health. An additional unintentional consequence of the representation is that stakeholders who exert power over young people such as parents and religious leaders have actively sought to regulate the meaning of the brand either through using formal channels of protest such as the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa or through preventing their youth from participating in loveLife's interpersonal programme.

This study proposes that the quality of media messages be measured in relation to the meanings that consumers and those that interact with them decode. This includes exploring the social identities that these meanings give rise to and manner in which these find meaning through everyday interaction and the extent to which these meanings correlate with those intended by the producers of the message.

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired Immune Deficiency Virus
<b>ASASA</b>	Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa
<b>CEO</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CCMS</b>	Centre for Cultural and Media Studies
<b>HIV</b>	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
<b>HST</b>	Health Systems Trust
<b>KFF</b>	Kaiser Family Foundation
<b>NAFCI</b>	National Adolescent Friendly Clinic Initiative
<b>NASHI</b>	National Adolescent Sexual Health Initiative
<b>PLHA</b>	People living with HIV/AIDS
<b>RHRU</b>	Reproductive Health Research Unit
<b>STI</b>	Sexually Transmitted Infections
<b>TAC</b>	Treatment Action Campaign
<b>TAG</b>	Technical Advisory Group
<b>UKZN</b>	University of KwaZulu-Natal
<b>UNAIDS</b>	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
<b>USSASA</b>	United Schools Sports Association of South Africa

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## **\*\*PREFACE**

For the past ten years I have worked on reproductive health and HIV prevention, and in particular social and behavioural change. This includes working on advocacy with the United Nations Population Fund for a new population policy for South Africa, and within the UNAIDS Regional Support Team for Eastern and Southern Africa on advocacy in relation to HIV prevention, care and support, and treatment.

During this period huge resources were mobilised in support of HIV. Until 1999 much of those resources were targeted towards HIV prevention and in South Africa a number of HIV prevention programmes were undertaken. However, from 1999 HIV prevention has received less attention in relation to the need to expand treatment to all people in need.

The formation of loveLife in 1999 represented a unique opportunity to impact on new HIV infections through blending together traditional marketing principles that combine media with quality service delivery to young people.

In 2001, David Harrison, Chief Executive Officer of loveLife, said in an interview that loveLife aimed to provide young people with an opportunity to both see and taste the loveLife lifestyle much like a conventional brand. As one of the most well-funded programmes its media programme alone was larger than many commercial brand managers have at their disposal to promote their products and services.

However, in 2001 questions on the new programme started to be raised. In particular these questions focussed on its outdoor media programme. One of the first critiques in this regard was an article by respected HIV prevention experts Daniel Halperin and Brian Williams, who questioned the impact the outdoor media was having on bringing about social and behavioural change. At the same time, religious groups started lodging complaints about loveLife with the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa regarding the representation of young people and their sexuality. People living with HIV also started to question the way in which loveLife represented them in its mass media programme.

While experts and adults were being heard regarding the loveLife outdoor media programme, the voices of young people remained silent, which, in 2001, prompted a study undertaken by myself which looked at how the young decoded the meanings of

the loveLife outdoor media. This study found that despite the huge resources being invested by loveLife in its outdoor and media programme, there was a discrepant decoding by young people of the loveLife outdoor media programme in relation to that intended by its producers (Delate 2001).

Following the publication of this study, many academic articles have emerged that have analysed the loveLife billboards and also the representation used by loveLife in its print media. But many failed to contextualise these studies within the context of the overall loveLife programme, its branding approach and the views and perspectives of young people regarding the loveLife programme.

loveLife, using traditional market research techniques and aided recall (where the subjects are shown the logo), claimed that its programme was having an impact. However, at the conceptualisation of the programme only limited formative research, comprising 26 focus groups, were undertaken that would enable a proper evaluation to determine the impact of the programme (Harrison and Steinberg 2002).

In 2003, I undertook an investigative article for *FairLady* that aimed to analyse the views of young people in relation to the overall loveLife programme. While undertaking research for this article, certain trends started to emerge. A cursory look at loveLife surveys indicates that there is a discrepancy between young people frequenting loveLife services and its media programme. The media programme appears to have given rise to recall of the loveLife logo, but this was not necessarily translating into the consumption of loveLife services.

The reasons underlying the lack of consumption of the loveLife services appeared to be partly ascribed to the lack of these services being widely available, but also to divisions between youth frequenting loveLife services and those that do not. It became apparent that in everyday life young people frequenting loveLife services were seen to signify meanings about themselves. This gave rise to group formation between those frequenting loveLife services and those not frequenting them.

These differences were often related to the manner in which young people decoded the representation of loveLife within its media programme. This manner gave rise to mental images of young people participating in the loveLife programmes. Within loveLife there were also differences between young people attending loveLife services, namely the S'camto groundBREAKERS, and young people that were participating in the loveLife services.

What became increasingly apparent was that loveLife, like other HIV prevention programmes, often regard communication as something that occurs between those that produce messages and the “target audience” that consumes the message. The target audience is passively positioned within the communicative process as something that something is done to rather than active participants within the communicative process who manipulate and use meanings produced by programme managers to signify meanings about themselves in everyday life.

In discussions with young people it became apparent that young people decode meanings from the representations of loveLife that give rise to mental impressions of young people participating in the loveLife programme that result in group formation. These decodings often position young people attending the loveLife programme as sexual beings rather than responsible and empowered young people who are working to make a difference in their lives. Conversely it became apparent that young people not attending the loveLife programme did so for a variety of reasons and that often parents and others regulated the participation of young people in the programme according to their impressions of loveLife in the mass media.

As a researcher I have found myself at times caught between different discourses that have sought to position myself as either against or in favour of loveLife. Critiquing a programme does not necessarily imply that one is opposed to the programme or seeks to undermine it. Rather, critiquing provides the opportunity to explore and learn from the experiences of programmes and, in this instance, from the loveLife programme so that this can inform knowledge and guide others who may seek to embark on similar processes. There is no doubt that the challenges confronting loveLife are the same that confront many other HIV prevention programmes. Learning is essential if we are to progress in mounting an effective response in future.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is estimated that young people aged under 25 years account for about half of all new HIV infections globally (UNAIDS 2006: 137). Their risk of infection is closely associated with the age of sexual debut, sex between young women and men aged at least five years older than them whether for transactional purposes or not, and low levels of knowledge of how to prevent HIV. This is linked to the number of longer-term concurrent partners combined with inconsistent and incorrect condom usage and low levels of male circumcision (SADC 2006: 3).

HIV prevalence in South Africa continues to increase despite the huge resources invested by government and donor agencies in promoting prevention, care and support and, increasingly, treatment. It is estimated that HIV prevalence, the percentage of all people aged two years and older living with HIV irrespective of when infection occurred, in South Africa, is 10.8 (9.9 – 11.6) per cent, and 10.3 (8.7 – 12.0) per cent amongst young people aged 15 – 24 years of age (Shisana et al 2005).

In the early phases of the epidemic (1990 – 1999) the attention globally was on the need to invest in HIV prevention activities. Many countries, including South Africa, were slow to respond in putting in place prevention programmes. Countries that had strategic responses like Thailand and Uganda have seen declines in HIV prevalence and incidence (UNAIDS 2006).

In South Africa, the apartheid government did not give much attention to prevention efforts around HIV, and when it did, these were couched in terms of race (van der Vliet 2001). One attempt to de-racialise HIV was in 1991 when the government introduced a yellow hand with the slogan “AIDS Don’t Let It Happen” (Parker, Dalrymple & Durden 1998).

It was during the Mandela era (1994 – 1999) that HIV prevention and awareness programmes became more prominent. *Soul City*, the internationally acclaimed edutainment programme, was broadcast for the first time in 1994 (UNAIDS 2005). The Red Ribbon was positioned as the national symbol for AIDS in 1995 with the slogan *AIDS: A New Struggle* by the national AIDS Directorate located within the Department of Health. The Beyond Awareness Campaign I & II [1997/8 – 2000] combined mass media approaches with specific campaigns to produce and disseminate information on AIDS (Tomaselli et al 2002; Parker 2000; Coulson Undated).

During this period innovative programmes produced and presented by people living with AIDS (PLWA), such as *Beat It* and *Positive* were broadcast on television. These were complemented by weekly newspaper columns by Kevin Osborne (*The Cape Argus*) and Lucky Mazibuko, *Just Call me Lucky* (*The Sowetan*). These efforts engaged conventional stereotypes of people living with HIV as sick and helpless and thereby challenged stigma and discrimination. They provided platforms for advocacy on current affairs issues (Osborne 2006).

However, the Mandela era was one in which a rift between government and civil society over the government's response to AIDS widened, a rift that would come to characterize the Mbeki era. The first spark of this rift was the government's handling of a communications intervention known as *Sarafina II* in 1995/1996, a theatrical production supported by the Department of Health at a cost of over R14 million (Phila Legislative Update 1996).<sup>1</sup>

The Mbeki era (2000 – 2005) has been characterized by debates and a breakdown in the relationships between government and civil society. This is to a great extent informed by an oppositional discourse relating to the representation and identity of Africans within the context of the AIDS pandemic as portrayed by the Western media and other dominant discourses concerning the epidemic. It also pertains to the contestation between the discourse of Western scientific medicine versus traditional knowledge and practice (Schneider & Fassin 2003).

These debates overshadowed the prevention efforts of the country, which are positioned by the government as the cornerstone of the national response in policy documents such as the National Strategic Plan (2000 – 2005), Cabinet Statements of 17 April and 9 October 2002 and the Operational Plan for a Comprehensive HIV and AIDS Care, Management and Treatment for South Africa (GCIS 2002a; GCIS 2002b; GCIS 2002c; GCIS 2002d; GCIS 2003a, GCIS 2003b; GCIS 2003c, Department of Health 2003).

In 2002 the government launched a new campaign called *Khomanani*, a Tsonga word meaning “caring for” or “supporting each other”, that was undertaken by the

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<sup>1</sup> (See statement by Minister's advisory Committee:  
<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/ccms/mediacommunication/pubhealthcommunication.asp?ID=9>)

ACT Consortium led by Johnnic Communications. This campaign was provided with a budget of R100 million for the period 2002-2003 - far more resources than were made available for the Beyond Awareness Campaign (SAPA 2002; GCIS 2003bc). Khomanani was extended for a further two years in 2004 and ended in March 2006 (Collinge 2005).

In September 2000, *Takalani Sesame* was launched featuring an HIV positive Muppet known as Kami. *Takalani Sesame* built on the successful *Sesame Street* television programme that was introduced into South Africa in 1996 to foster the intellectual, cultural and emotional development of pre-school children (UNAIDS 2005).

However, there was little if any coordination amongst mass media and social mobilization interventions being undertaken for HIV prevention. This resulted in a lack of focus of the national effort, duplication of efforts with most campaigns focusing on youth, at times conflictual and confusing messaging, open competition and animosity (Collinge 2005; Shisana et al 2005).

Increasingly there is recognition of the need to refocus and re-energize evidence-based prevention efforts in combination with treatment. The Minister of Health, in line with a declaration by African Health Ministers in August 2005, declared 2006 as the Year for Accelerating Access to Prevention.

The renewed focus on HIV prevention has given rise to questions being asked of the efficacy of media HIV prevention interventions and their ability to curb new infections. Despite the range of media interventions, new HIV infections continue to increase with an estimated 3.3% incidence rate amongst young people during 2005. Young women aged 15 – 24 are three to four times more likely to be living with HIV than young males in the same age category. While knowledge of HIV may be high amongst young people, their understanding of how to prevent HIV, such as partner reduction, is extremely low (Shisana et al 2005).

This thesis focuses on one of the largest HIV youth prevention campaigns ever undertaken, namely loveLife. It is estimated that during the period 1999 – 2005 more than \$130 million was invested in the programme (Singer 2005). It contributes towards the current debates and focus on HIV prevention by examining the perspectives of young people regarding the meanings of loveLife and the manner in which these are appropriated within their daily lives.

## **loveLife: An Introductory Overview**

loveLife was established in September 1999 by the US-based Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, bringing together the collective efforts of a consortium of non-governmental organisations concerned with adolescent reproductive health in South Africa. The consortium initially comprised Advocacy Initiatives, Health Systems Trust, Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa and the Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU) (loveLife undated(a)).

loveLife's primary objective is to reduce the rate of new HIV infections, sexually transmitted infections and teenage pregnancy amongst young South Africans aged 12 – 17 years. It aims to achieve this through promoting a healthy lifestyle using a brand-driven approach that combines traditional commercial marketing techniques with service delivery, institutional support and outreach (loveLife 2001: 8; loveLife undated(ab)). The role of the media programme is to promote the loveLife brand as part of popular culture and to promote its services. The service delivery and outreach components are aimed at enabling young people to experience the loveLife lifestyle in their own lives (Harrison & Nwokedi-Fortuin 2001).

loveLife's media programme uses a range of mediums including television advertisements and programmes (*S'camto GroundBREAKERS* and the *loveLife Games*), print media supplements (*S'camto Print*, *ThetaNathi* and *S'camto Uncut*), radio programmes in local languages and outdoor/mobile media comprising billboards and advertisements on minibus taxi's (Altman 2002; Stadler & Hlongwa 2002; Harrison & Steinberg 2002).

loveLife's service delivery and institutional support structures include (Altman 2002; Stadler & Hlongwa 2002; Harrison & Steinberg 2002):

- A toll-free helpline called ThetaJunction;
- Multipurpose youth centres (Y-centres) that provide adolescent reproductive health services together with entertainment and sports-related activities;
- Adolescent youth-friendly clinics within accredited clinics;
- loveLife "franchises" where community organizations can become part of the loveLife programme if they subscribe to the loveLife approach. It enables them to access loveLife materials and services (loveLife 2001).

Recognising the limited outreach of these mechanisms, loveLife has developed a number of mobile outreach programmes to complement its services and mass media. These include (Altman 2002; Stadler & Hlongwa 2002; Harrison & Steinberg 2002):

- The loveLife Games, which occur at regional, provincial and national level and comprise sports, debating, motivational and leadership programmes.
- loveTours and the loveTrain that visit more remote areas providing art, sports, information and discussion with young people, as well as music together with information on adolescent sexual and reproductive health and HIV prevention.

### **Rationale for Studying the loveLife Lifestyle Brand**

Controversy has courted loveLife since its inception with the main focus falling on its HIV messaging, particularly in relation to its outdoor media.

HIV prevention specialists Daniel Halperin and Brian Williams questioned the efficacy of the outdoor campaign in relation to the meanings people were deriving from the loveLife billboards depicting the words “score” and “red card”.

*Very few of the several hundred other young people we spoke with throughout the country showed any clear interest in this high profile initiative – although they obviously were concerned, even obsessed, with the issue it purports to address (Halperin & Williams 2001).*

The National Association of People living with AIDS (NAPWA) objected to a billboard – “Everyone one he has slept with is sleeping with you”. NAPWA argued that this billboard not only perpetuated stigma and discrimination towards people living with HIV, but in particular “the myth that blacks are responsible for spreading AIDS ...(and) suggests that other races are responsible in terms of how to handle sexual matters” (*Saturday Star* 2003).

An article for *FairLady* noted discrepant decodings of the loveLife messages by a female participant at a Y-centre who decoded a billboard featuring a statement by young people reading “*I only do it skin-on-skin/I told James to wrap it or zip it*” as “*I think it’s like his girlfriend telling him to shut up or something like that*”(Delate 2003).

In March 2006, an array of HIV organizations wrote a letter to loveLife requesting that the organization withdraw its “Face It” series of billboards for a variety of

reasons including the perpetuation of stigma and discrimination towards people living with AIDS, demonizing pregnant girls as being responsible for the spreading of HIV and for “feeding into moralistic constructions of HIV infection” (ACCESS et al 2006; Billboards 2006: An open letter to loveLife). Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) Treasurer, Mark Heywood, one of the objecting organizations, described the messaging as “...very expensive messaging if it’s totally off mark and if it’s damaging in some cases” (*Business Day* 2006).

Several academic studies have also raised concerns regarding the decodings of the loveLife outdoor media. A semiotic analysis of the loveLife HIS & HERS Billboards found discrepant readings of the meanings by young people who participated in the study. This study concluded that complex messaging undermined the intentions of loveLife to get young people to “talk about it” out of fear of seeming foolish (Delate, 2001: 23; see also Jordaan 2006). As one respondent stated:

*The thing is if you don't understand it you don't want to make yourself look stupid and go up to somebody and you know do you understand that and its plain and simple. So I do not think that many people like to speak about the billboards when they don't understand. It's embarrassing to ask what it means (Male participant, Pretoria).*

*These are the only ads that people don't really speak about because they don't understand them.*

A study amongst students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal that tested a series of loveLife billboards, including one featuring two young people in bed under the slogan of “No Pressure” (that was intended to promote the delay of sex) found a discrepant decoding amongst the participants to the study of the meanings of the billboards (Morrison 2003: 76).

*There is no pressure to engage in sexual intercourse but the fact that they are both already nude in bed conveys a different message.*

*The picture is actually advocating sex.*

Other critics have questioned the cultural relevance of the campaign and accused it of promoting a consumerist culture (Epstein 2003; Parker 2006). Christine Quanta questioned the “pseudo-American cultural context” in which the loveLife messages

have been placed and their efficacy in communicating HIV messages in a cultural context (*Business Day* 2002).

*A further problem with the billboard ads is that they are situated in a pseudo-American cultural context. The problems with the dominance of US cultural on our television screens and music have been raised repeatedly.*

Helen Epstein writing in *New York Times Book Review* (2003) describes loveLife as an attempt to create a new "consumerist man and woman", noting that "it seems a mad experiment to see whether teenagers living through very difficult times can be persuaded to choose a new lifestyle as they might choose a new brand of shampoo..." These observations have been supported in two studies undertaken on loveLife.

*loveLife has attached itself to the ideology of globalization through its construction of youth as consumers, and the linking of this analysis to the programme's model for HIV prevention through promoting a positive youth lifestyle...This vision is perpetuated through loveLife publications such as S'camto Print which integrates discourses on sexual health, personal reflections, fashion, music films and the like, interspersed with advertisements for global and local branded goods, Hollywood films and a general emphasis on the intersections between global and local and the reification of consumption (Parker 2005).*

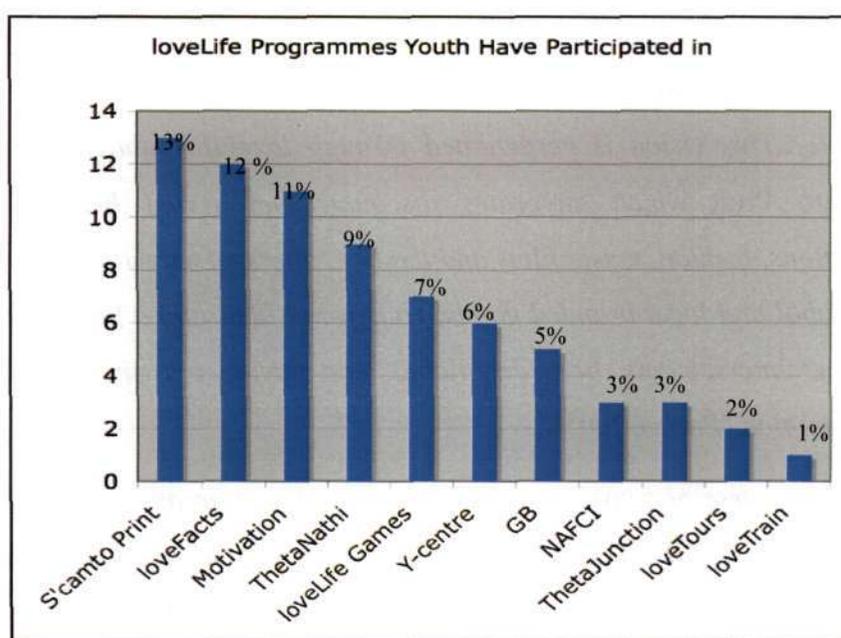
*...the discourse of consumerism has made manifest an approach that neither privileges HIV/AIDS discourse nor does it privilege alternative sexual health messages of constructs of gender. loveLife treats its audience as homogenous with equal access to sexual choice and this lack of context also detracts from its goals. Ultimately, loveLife does not serve as a voice for gender transformation, which is critical in attempts to change behaviour around HIV/AIDS - a point that loveLife itself explicitly acknowledges (Templeton, 2003).*

Parker (2006) questions the manner in which loveLife has manipulated research to position itself within the South African AIDS landscape through monocausal claims of impact, noting that behavioural change is not the outcome of a single intervention but rather of a complex array of interventions that inform a person's understanding of HIV.

Recent surveys indicated that there are high levels of awareness and perceived usefulness of loveLife. A loveLife study found that more than 85% of young people aged 15-24 report having heard or seen of loveLife, with 82% of all young people surveyed thinking that loveLife was useful (Pettifor et al 2004). The HSRC – Nelson Mandela Household survey estimates awareness of loveLife amongst young people aged at 15-24 at 72% with 90.5% of this group perceiving loveLife as a useful vehicle for information on HIV (Shisana et al 2005).

While awareness of loveLife is high and the overwhelming majority believes that it is a good thing, this does not appear to be correlated with high levels of engagement with the programme, as demonstrated in the graph below.

**Figure 1: loveLife programmes youth have participated in**



Source: Pettifor, et al. (2004). HIV and Sexual Behaviour among young South Africans: A National Survey of 15 -24 year olds. Johannesburg. Reproductive Health Research Unit. University of the Witwatersrand.

The surveys cited above provide good insight into how loveLife is perceived but do not offer an explanation of the relationship between exposure and decodings and the manner in which these are appropriated by young people in everyday life. My study addresses this gap by examining the interrelationship between the meanings represented and produced of the loveLife lifestyle brand and those consumed and

appropriated by young people and the manner in which these meanings are regulated by other audiences that seek to influence the behaviours of young people.

Particular questions that this study focuses on are:

1. What are the meanings that young people ascribe to the commercial brands with which they identify in relation to their socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and the manner in which these are appropriated within their daily lives?
2. What are the meanings that young people from different socio-economic backgrounds ascribe to the loveLife lifestyle brand and the manner in which they appropriate these within their daily lives?

This study draws upon the “Circuit of Culture” to provide a semiotic analysis of the meanings represented by loveLife through its media and interpersonal programmes. It explores the process through which these meanings are produced by loveLife. The meanings that young people decode of the loveLife lifestyle brand and the extent to which these correlate with the meanings intended by the producers of loveLife are appropriated within everyday life to signify meaning about themselves. It examines how other audiences interacting with the loveLife lifestyle brand decode and seeks to regulate the meanings produced by loveLife. In applying this framework this study is guided by the work of Du Gay (1997a) on the Sony Walkman that developed and applied the circuit of culture to analyse the struggle for meaning in relation to the Sony Walkman. Readers who are unfamiliar with the loveLife may wish to first consult the chapter on Production before looking at the chapter on Representation.

This study builds upon the previous research undertaken on the loveLife programme. This includes a semiotic analysis of the loveLife HIS & HERS billboard Campaign (Delate 2001) and loveLife Print Publications for the UKZN Honours Entertainment Education Module (Delate, 2002), and an investigative article for *FairLady* (Delate, 2003). It complements a CCMS PhD thesis (Parker 2005) that explored how loveLife utilises discourse to position itself in relation to other HIV prevention interventions, and other academic work Morrison (2003) and Templeton (2003). Through examining how young people decode and consume the loveLife "lifestyle" brand, this thesis sets out to review youth and related perspectives upon which loveLife's ideological positioning is based.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework: The Making of Meaning

This study examines the manner in which brands come to have meaning through using theoretical approaches within cultural studies. Cultural studies examines the meanings of cultural artifacts and the social practices that arise from the use of these items in everyday life through which people are defined as individuals, citizens, members of a particular class, race or gender (Turner 2003).

A cultural artifact is defined as an object that has a distinctive set of meanings and practices related to itself. The meanings that are attributed to it conjure up specific images, ideas or concepts for which the artifact stands. Bringing an artifact into discourse makes it part of culture, bridging the gap between the material world and the symbolic world of language, thinking and communication. This enables the cultural artifact to be classified and differentiated from other cultural artifacts (Du Gay et al 1997a).

Cultural studies define culture as being concerned with the production and exchange of meanings among members of a society or group. Meaning is dependent upon the members of a society being able to make sense of the world in roughly the same way. This requires that they share the same conceptual frameworks to place and understand the meanings of the cultural artifact, to formulate ideas and communicate about it. As du Gay et al (1997a: 10) explains:

*Meaning helps us to interpret the world, to classify it in meaningful ways to makes sense of things and events...Meanings bridge the gap between the material work and world in which language, thinking and communication takes place – the 'symbolic world'.*

Cultural meanings include the social practices that arise through the manner in which the meaning of cultural artifacts are integrated into daily life. These meanings are dependent on the way in which they are represented, utilised, thought about, interpreted and integrated within everyday life to stand for or express something about those that use them (Du Gay et al 1997a). As Hall (1997a: 9-10) suggests:

*Belonging to a culture provides us with access to such shared frameworks or maps of meaning which we use to place and understand things, to 'make*

*sense' of the world, to formulate ideas and to communicate or exchange ideas and meanings about it.*

Meaning is produced through language. Language comprises signs and symbols that represent what exists in the world as a meaningful concept, image or idea that enables us share and exchange meanings. Language not only refers to the written and spoken language, but also to sounds, images, paintings, photographs or any sign that expresses or communicates ideas (Hall 1997a).

## **Semiotics**

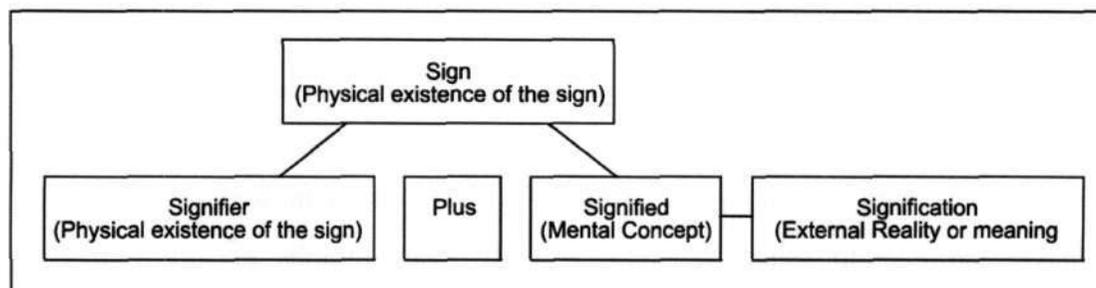
Semiotics is the study of signs and examines how signs come to have meaning through the social encounters between individuals, groups and classes and their understanding of the world and conditions of existence (Tomaselli 1996). Semiotics recognizes that the meaning of a sign is also formed through the manner in which it is used within social contexts (MacKay 1997).

Ferdinand de Saussure (1959) defines a sign as comprising the following elements:

- *the signifier*, which is the form of the sign be it a word, image or a photograph we can see or hear or the physical form of the sign.
- *the signified* or the concept/idea that is developed in the mind of the reader from seeing the sign. This is not the thing *per se* but a notion of it.
- **the signifier and the signified combined give rise to certain meanings of the sign, which Saussure calls *signification*.**

The meaning of a sign is arbitrary and needs to be learned as there are no clear linkages between the signifier and the signified. It is through shared culture and language that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is defined, and this gives meaning to the sign through signification (Fiske 1990: 43-45; Hall 1997a: 31; Chandler 1995: [www.aber.ac.uk](http://www.aber.ac.uk)).

**Figure 2: Fiske's Representation of the Saussurean model of the sign**



Source: Fiske, J. (1990). Introduction to communication studies. Routledge. London

Signs operate within the broader system of language comprising two elements: *Langue* and *Parole* (Hall 1997a).

*Langue* refers to the general rules and codes of the linguistic system, which must be shared in order for communication to take place. These are learned and enable language to be used in social contexts. In other words, *Langue* can be structured and studied scientifically. *Parole* refers to the particular act of speaking, writing or drawing using the structure and rules of language or *Langue*. This cannot be studied scientifically as it lacks structural properties (Hall 1997a).

Each culture and language has a different set of signifieds, a distinctive way of organising the world into concepts and categories. A tree in English can only be a tree because we call it a tree. A tree is called "arbre" in French. The meaning of the word is only possible if a person shares the same conceptual framework or language that enables them to interpret the meaning of the sign (Hall 1997a).

The meaning of a sign is also generated through its relation to its opposite, and this enables categorisation. For example, the meaning of "day" is dependent on the meaning of "night". The oppositional nature of signs is known as binary oppositions – opposition here relates to the differential meaning of the sign (Chandler 1995).

Meanings of signs are not fixed, but evolve and are open to the constant production of new meanings and new interpretations, for example the word "gay". It once referred to being happy, but from the late 1970s or early 1980s it was appropriated to describe a certain identity and lifestyle adopted by homosexual men (Hall 1997a).

Charles Sanders Peirce proposed three types of signs according to which the relationship between the signifier and the signified can be defined: iconic, indexical and symbolic signs (cf. Tomaselli 1996).

An *iconic sign* looks like the object being signified and resembles its object through its similarity. However, there are no “pure” icons, for all icons owe their meaning to an element of cultural convention being involved in its representation. A picture of a dog would be an iconic sign as the reader can recognize it as a dog (Hall 1997a; Tomaselli 1999; Fiske 1990; Chandler 1995).

An *indexical sign* draws attention to that which it refers which is unseen and has an existential relationship to the phenomenon it depicts. Smoke is an indexical sign to fire, a weathercock is indexical as it draws attention to the direction of the wind (Hall 1997a; Tomaselli 1999; Fiske 1990; Chandler 1995).

A *symbolic sign* has no clear connection to the idea it represents, but refers to the object it denotes by virtue of law, convention, agreement or rule. Words and numbers are examples of symbols as the relationship has to be learnt. The interpretation of the symbol is dependent upon the context in which it is used (Hall 1997a; Tomaselli 1999; Fiske 1990; Chandler 1995).

Signs on their own have a limited meaning but strung together they form a code. This allows for a coherent meaning to be established through the linking of words, pictures and other forms of representation in terms of socially agreed rules. The correlation of signifiers with the signifieds into a meaningful code enables a coherent meaning of the sign to be developed into texts. In creating texts, signs are chosen and combined to limit the range of meanings (Chandler 1995; Hall 1980a; Hall 1997; Tomaselli 1999).

There are two dimensions to text, namely text as a product that refers to a television programme, article or book, which he describes as inactive text, and activated text, which refers to messages that are the outcomes of the manner in which reader/viewer/listener interacts with the signs (Tomaselli 1996).

Codes place signs within maps of meaning that have a whole range of social meanings, practices, usages, power and interest written into them. In order to understand meaning, it is necessary to analyse the underlying rules and codes through which objects produce meaning (Hall 1980a).

Through analyzing the rules and codes of signs it is possible to determine their connotative and denotative meanings. The denotative meaning is the simple descriptive or literal meaning of the sign, where most people would agree on the

meaning of the sign (Hall 1980a). The connotative meaning refers to the range of associative meanings that lie beyond the literal meaning of the sign to which there is no obvious linkage. The connotative meaning of the sign is interpreted according to the general beliefs, conceptual frameworks and the value systems of society, which is akin to context (Hall 1997a).

It is possible to distinguish between con-text and context. *Con-text* refers to the historical environment in which the interpretant is produced and perceived, including “the web of conflicting historical, social, economic, political and psychological discourses out of which all kinds of texts arise”. The context refers to the “historical material processes into which individuals are born and of which they be unaware” (Tomaselli 1996: 34).

## **Myth**

Roland Barthes (1957) explored the connotative meanings of signs which he called myth. Myth is defined as a global sign, comprising the associative total of a concept and an image that is formed by the manner in which an object is represented in language and that gives rise to a certain message.

*Myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message...Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things. A tree is a tree ... A tree expressed by Minout Drouet is no longer quite a tree, it is a tree which is decorated, adapted to a certain type of consumption, laden with literary self indulgence, revolt, images, in short with a type of social usage which is added to pure matter (Barthes 1972: 109).*

In reading signs it is possible to have a preferred (dominant) meaning or a discrepant reading. To a large extent the preferred reading is determined by the dominant cultural order, which is always being contested and represented through differing views, but which does organize social life into dominant or preferred meanings. It is possible to have discrepant readings, where the meaning intended by the maker of a sign does not correlate to the meaning held by the reader of the sign, i.e. it's an unintended meaning (Tomaselli 1996).

The term “reading” is used to reinforce the notion that audiences are active in the making of meaning and are not merely the passive recipients of messages. The term reading not only refers to the ability of the audience to identify and decode a certain number of signs, but also to place the signs being employed in relationship to other signs within their total environment (Hall 1980a).

## **Discourse**

Discourse examines how knowledge about a particular topic is constructed through the clustering of ideas, images and practices through language that provide ways for talking about objects, statements, concepts and strategies associated with a particular topic that gives rise to social practices (Hall 1997a). As Foucault indicates:

*...I shall take as my starting point whatever unities are already given (such as psychopathology, medicine, or political economy); but I shall not place myself inside the dubious unities in order to study their internal configuration or the secret contradictions. I shall make use of them just long enough to ask myself what unities they form; by what right they can claim a field that specifies them in space and a continuity that individualizes them in time; according to what laws they are formed; against the background of which discursive events they stand out; and whether they are not, in accepted and quasi-institutional individuality, ultimately the surface effect of more firmly grounded unities (Foucault 1969: 26).*

Discourse comprises a series of statements that are related or connected to one another and that are created within a specific time frame or period to give rise to social practices, which Foucault termed “discursive practices” (Foucault 1969). He continues:

*... Whenever, between objects, types of statements, concepts or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlation, positions and functioning, transformations), we will say for the sake of convenience that we are dealing with a discursive formation ... The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, mode of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation (Foucault 1969: 38).*

Discourse is not only concerned with how things come to mean, but the manner in which this meaning is produced according to the “rules of formation” that enable them to become part of our language. This is dependent upon a complex set of relationships. These include the institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification and modes of characterizations that enable the discourse to appear and through which we can place it, juxtapose it, situate it in relation to others, define its difference and its heterogeneity (Foucault 1969). In analysing discourses, Foucault says that:

*One sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define ... the ordering of objects... A task that consists of not – of no longer - treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak. Of course discourses are composed of signs, but what they do is more than use these signs to designate things. It is this more that renders them irreducible to language (langue) and to speech. It is this more that we must reveal and describe (Foucault 1969: 46).*

Artifacts and social practices in themselves do not have meaning – they only come to have meaning if they become the objects of knowledge produced within discourse. Discourse is not static, but is defined in relation to a given historical context (time and place) within which it occurs. Understanding or meaning of a given discourse therefore evolves over time and in relation to the knowledge accumulated at that given point. This knowledge is produced through

*... practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak and which often emanate from institutional sources such as the discourse of the church or the discourse of Microsoft Corporation. Social speech and writing is linked to social power. Often it is literally the expression of power, though not always, since socially subordinate groups that speak – generate discourse too. Discourses are often in conflict with other discourses in their explicit or implicit claims to define the truth of things (Marris & Thornham 1996: 267).*

The manner in which artifacts come to enter into discourse and become “true” is through their production by institutional sources that employ discourses through a common strategy that defines the object, organizes ideas in relation to the object and

seeks to regulate conduct in relation to the object. What is “true” today may be supplanted by a new discourse or what Foucault refers to as an episteme that will arise in a different historical context (Foucault 1998).

### **Knowledge/Power**

Foucault was not only concerned with how knowledge of a particular topic, concept or object arose through discourse, but also with the power relations and structures that give rise to the development of a particular discourse. Knowledge and power reside in a “symbiotic relationship” where the one gives rise to the other:

*We should admit rather that power produces knowledge ... that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations (Foucault 1977: 27).*

The term “power” describes the power relations that arise from those who are engaged in the production and exchange of signs that give rise to discourse. Discourse therefore designates relationships of power between partners “where the actions of one induces another and follows from another” (Foucault 1994c: 340).

*Power relations are exercised to an exceedingly important extent, through the production and exchange of signs; and they are scarcely separable from goal directed activities that permit the exchange of power (such as training techniques, processes of domination, the means by which obedience is obtained), or that, to enable them to operate, call on relations of power (the division of labour and the hierarchy of tasks (Foucault 1994c: 338).*

Knowledge is dependent upon the discourse that gives rise to a subject - the subject that is produced through establishing rules, conventions and dispositions of power within the discourse.

Stuart Hall (1997) defines the “subject” as having two meanings, both of which imply a form of power that “subjugates”. The first relates to being subjected to someone else’s control and dependence. The second refers to one’s “own identity by a conscience and self-knowledge”. The subject, therefore, is produced within discourse and not outside of it, and becomes the bearer of the knowledge that is produced, but it is not necessarily the author of the discourse:

*The subject is produced within discourse. This subject of discourse cannot be outside of discourse, because it must be subjected to discourse. It must submit to its rules and conventions, to its dispositions of power/knowledge. The subject can become the bearer of the kind of knowledge, which discourse produces. It can become the object through which power is relayed. But it cannot stand outside power/knowledge as its source and author (Hall 1997a: 55).*

### **Interpellation of the Subject**

Foucault's concept of the subject being produced within discourse resonates with Louis Althusser's (1968) concept of the interpellation of the subject within ideological discourses. According to Althusser (1968) ideologies hail individuals as subjects, asking them to take up a proposition. Should the individual respond to the hailing, they are recruited as a subject of that ideology:

*I shall then suggest that ideology "acts" or "functions" in such a way that it recruits subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: "Hey you there" (Althusser 1968: 699).*

Ideology is defined as an imaginary construction of reality, by one group or another, that aims to ensure that people see the world according to the terms and codes that have been set by one or more groups to maintain or to challenge particular social organisations and relations of power (Althusser 1968).

There is no one dominant ideology at any given time. Rather there exist a number of ideologies produced by different groups who are all struggling in what Gramsci refers to as a "war of position" for dominance and power over another in order to ensure hegemony, or domination (cited in Grossberg 1996). Ideology, like discourse, is not only concerned with examining the ways in which things come to mean, but also with the structures that construct different ideologies and the social relations and power dynamics that arise from their construction (Grossberg; Wartella and Whitney 1998).

✧ Discourses can only be effective if they recruit people as subjects and if they take up the position being offered by the particular discourse through appropriating it within their daily lives. The manner in which they use these discourses within their

social environments enables them to express meaning about themselves and their identity (Woodward 1997).

Identities are constructed within discourses through specific discursive formations and practices by specific enunciative strategies that involve a play of power that mark difference and the definition of the other according to which people define their identity (Woodward 1997). Hall uses:

*'identity' to refer to the meeting point, the point of suture, between on the one hand the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be spoken. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions, which discursive practices construct for us* (Hall 1996b: 5 - 6).

One of the mechanisms through which ideologies interpellate the subject is through the use of stereotypes. A stereotype reduces people to a few, simple and essential characteristics that give rise to a symbolic boundary that defines "us" and "them" (Hall 1997b). The stereotype acts as a form of ordering that enables people to make sense of the world through generalities, patterning and typifications, which give rise to various connotations (Dyer 1996). The production of the stereotype hails the viewer, listener or reader to take up the space being offered through identification, which is the result of the articulation of the character within the text (Woolacot 1996; Dyer 1996).

In its common sense form, identification is defined as the process of identifying with others, either through lack of awareness of difference or as a result of perceived similarities. Identification provides us with a sense of belonging, which has its origin in discourse, representation and difference (Woodward, 1997).

### **Encoding/Decoding**

Meaning does not arise from objects, statements, concepts and strategies. Rather meaning is produced by those who encode meanings in conjunction with audiences who decode or interpret meanings and appropriate them within their everyday lives (Hall, 1980a). Encoding and decoding are not only limited to the producer and

✕ audience. The audience encodes meaning about themselves through the manner in which they use “objects” within their daily lives.

Articulation is the process in which connections are made by joining together different parts to make a meaningful whole that foregrounds the context in which communication takes place as the object of analysis (Slack 1996: 112). Articulation challenges the notion that communication is a linear process comprising a sender–message–receiver. Rather, articulation regards communication as a structure of relations through which meanings and messages are produced, circulated, distributed, consumed and reproduced in the form of sign vehicles, which are organized and operated through discourse (Hall 1980b). These are not separate moments. Rather they are all interlinked and there can be no meaning if there is no consumption and no consumption if there is no production. In the making of meanings and messages it is ✕ the discursive form of the message that has a privileged position in the communication exchange (Hall 1980a). Hall adds:

*So the so-called unity of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements, which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary belongingness. The unity, which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions but need not necessarily, be connected (Hall 1996a: 141).*

The making or production of meaning is defined as encoding. Encoding refers not only to the final form that the message takes, but also the manner in which it is produced, the technical skills, the professional ideologies, the institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions about the audience that are employed. It is recognized that in the production of the discourse, producers draw upon other discursive formations and sources from the wider socio-cultural and political structure, thereby making the audience both the source and the receiver of the message. Encoding not only examines the production of discourse, but also how the message is made into a communicative event through its circulation, which enables it to become a meaningful discourse (Hall 1980a).

Decoding refers not only to the interpretation of the message by the receiver, but also to the appropriation of the discourse which enables it to be taken up as part of social practice:

✧ *Before this message can have an 'effect' (however defined), satisfy a 'need' or be put to 'use', it must first be appropriated as a meaningful discourse and be meaningfully decoded. It is this set of decoded meanings, which 'have an effect', influence, entertain, instruct or persuade, with very complex perceptual, cognitive, emotional, ideological or behavioral consequences. In a 'determinate' moment the structure employs a code and yields a 'message': at another determinate moment the 'message' via its decodings, issues into the structure of social practices (Hall 1980a: 130).*

✧ In the making of meaning, that which is intended by the producer of the messages may not correlate with that which is interpreted by the receiver of the message. Hall again:

*...The degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange – depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry in the communicative exchange (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personifications', encoder–producer and decoder–receiver. But this in turn depends on the degrees of identity/non-identity between the codes, which perfectly or imperfectly transmit, interrupt or systematically distort what has been transmitted. The lack of fit between the codes has a great deal to do with the structural differences of relation and positions between broadcasters and audiences, but it also has something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of 'source' and 'receiver' at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form. What are called 'distortions' or 'misunderstandings' arise precisely from the lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange (Hall 1980a: 131).*

## **Summary**

Artifacts and social practices in and of themselves have no meaning. Meaning is produced through language that combines signs to give rise to a particular discourse comprising a number of discursive statements that together enable knowledge to arise about a particular topic, object or concept within a given point in time. In order to read and make sense of the signs and the discourse, the audience has the same conceptual maps of meaning through which they can place the discourse, contrast it with others and appropriate it within everyday life (Hall 1997a).

As Foucault indicates (1969), discourse not only gives rise to knowledge, but hails us as subjects to take up that knowledge and to appropriate it within everyday life. By doing so it seeks to interpellate the audience as subjects, thereby making the audience the bearers of the discourse through using it to express meaning about themselves. That gives rise to social practices that define “us” and “them”.

The production of knowledge implies a symbiotic relationship of power between those that produce or encode meanings and those that receive or decode meanings. The struggle for meaning relates to that which the producer of the discourse produced, or the dominant meaning, and that which is decoded by the receiver of the message. The extent to which the decoded meaning correlates to that intended by the producer is dependent upon the degree of symmetry of the signs employed by the producer to represent the cultural artifact. The representation of the cultural artifact over time enables the audience to form a mental picture of the discourse that the artifact represents. Identification with the representation of the artifact may result in the target audience appropriating the artifact within their daily lives to express meaning about themselves. Therefore the struggle for meaning is not only confined between the producer and the audience but also between those that appropriate the artifact to express something about themselves within their everyday lives, and those that do not – which gives rise to group formation.

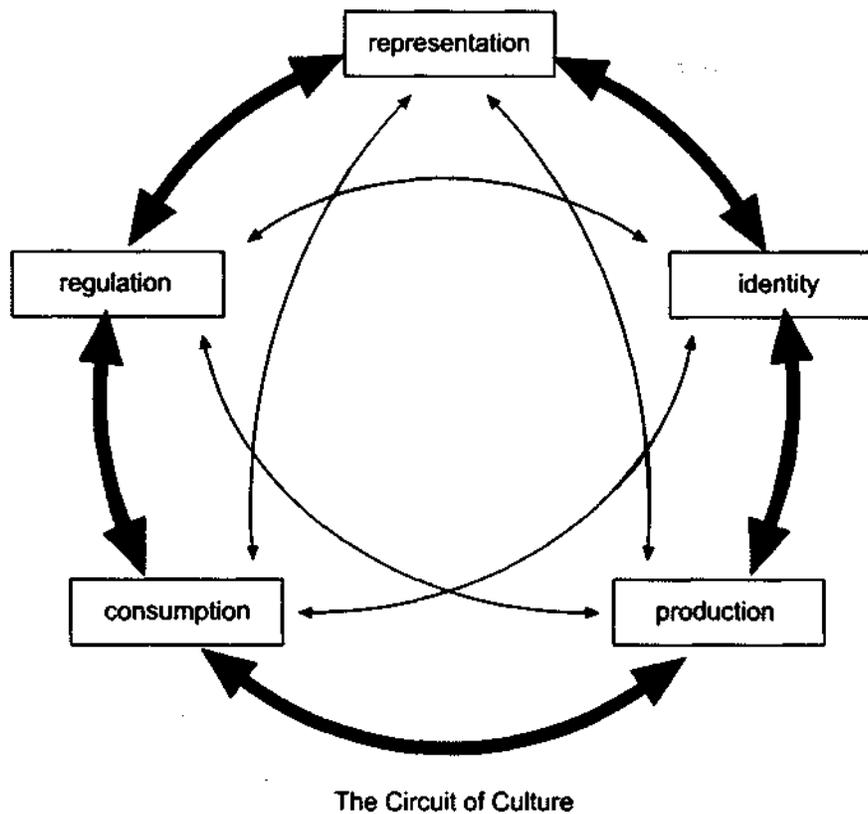
## Chapter 3: The Circuit of Culture as a Framework for Studying Brands as Cultural Artifacts

Discourses are produced by the cultural producers and are encoded into signs by the cultural intermediaries to signify meaning which are then decoded by the audience and appropriated within everyday life to signify meaning. loveLife produces discourses relating to adolescent reproductive health and HIV prevention that are encoded in its media and service delivery programmes. The meanings that loveLife encodes and the meanings that the audience decodes are not necessarily the same. The “Circuit of Culture” provides a method through which we can examine the contest for meaning between those produced and encoded by loveLife, and those decoded by the audience and the manner in which the audiences manipulates these meanings in everyday life to signify meaning about themselves.

The “*Circuit of Culture*” provides a framework through which an analysis can be undertaken of the meanings of cultural artifacts through different linked but distinct moments, namely 1) the manner in which they are represented, 2) produced and distributed, 3) consumed by consumers to express social meanings and identities and of themselves and 4) the institutions and people that attempt to regulate these (du Gay 1997a: 3). The circuit of culture, therefore, provides the framework through which the meanings of brands can be studied as cultural artifacts.

The “*Circuit*” challenges the assumption that meaning is produced and passively received by audiences. Rather, a struggle for meaning occurs. Audiences are as active in the construction of meaning as is the producer. The struggle for meaning therefore is not limited to that encoded by the producers and decoded by the receiver – rather, meaning is contested through the social identities that people express through their appropriation of the cultural artifact within our everyday lives, which others may seek to regulate. Meaning is therefore articulated and actively contested at the various sites around the “*Circuit of Culture*” (du Gay 1997a; Tompson 1997; MacKay 1997; de Chernatony & McDonald 2003).

**Figure 3: The Circuit of Culture: Source: du Gay 1997a: 3)**



Source: du Gay, P et al. (1997a). *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman*. London: Sage

The "*Circuit of Culture*" was developed with regard to a study of the discourses produced or encoded by the Sony Corporation through its articulation of the meanings of the Sony Walkman. This study emphasized that objects in themselves do not have meaning. Rather the meaning of the object resides in the manner in which it is made meaningful through discourses that enable us to classify it and distinguish it from others. This includes the social practices these discourses give rise to, and the manner in which others seek to regulate these meanings (Du Gay 1997a).

### **Brands Across the Circuit of Culture.**

A brand is a cultural artifact that combines signs and symbols that are articulated through discourse, and that, over time, come to be associated with a set of specific concepts.

The term "brand" has its origins in Old Norse and originates from the branding of livestock by early man to designate ownership. As a marketing tool, the concept of a brand evolved from the Middle Ages where it was used as a differentiating

mechanism between goods and services as a guarantee of the source. With the advent of advertising in the early 1900s, brand names were used to differentiate between different competing products, to promote awareness of reliability, and as a guarantee of consistent quality made recognizable through attractive packaging. In the 1960s, an additional emphasis was legal protection against “imitations” (Blackett 2003; de Chernatony & McDonald 2003).

Increased choices and greater sophistication amongst consumers resulted in the producers adding an emotional dimension to their brands in an effort to reflect the moods, personalities and messages consumers wanted to convey (Gobè 2001). However, with more choices and a more complex marketing environment, consumers began to use brand names as shorthand devices that were conceptually linked to an array of meanings based on their experience in conjunction with exposure to marketing communication (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003). Brands are not the same as products; rather brands give meaning to products through the brand discourse:

*A product is manufactured, a brand is created. A product may change over time, but the brand remains. A brand only exists in and through communication. The communication of the brand proclaims its singular and durable identity, its territory as a brand... The brand must be distinct from its competition. In fact it is the competition that helps form the brand identity. A brand is a memory bank carrying all its history, which constitutes its accumulated capital. The brand must continue to build new communications and assert its presence, but in doing so it must consistently maintain its identity (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003: 68).*

- ✘ A product would be a “car” that signifies an object that comprises four wheels used for purposes of transportation. The concept of the car changes over time in terms of different models that reflect advances in motor technology. By adding the letters BMW the meaning of the product – car – takes on an entirely different meaning that incorporates particular discourses which include additional connotations of style, German engineering, safety, status, etc. (Clifton, Simmons, et al 2003). These additional meanings reflect the brand discourse that remains relatively consistent over time.

These meanings are produced so that the consumer builds up a coherent understanding of the meanings that the brand conveys. This can be understood as the brand myth. As Barthes writes:

*Language lends itself to myth in another way: it is very rare that it imposes at the outset a full meaning which it is impossible to distort. This comes from the abstractness of its concept: the concept of tree is vague, it lends itself to multiple contingencies. True, a language always has at its disposal a whole appropriating organization (this tree, that tree which, etc.). But there always remains around the final meaning, a halo of virtualities where other possible meanings are floating: the meaning can almost always be interpreted. One could say that a language offers to myth an open-work meaning (Barthes 1957: p. 132).*

The manner through which we come to interpret the brand is dependent on past communication and the manner in which the brand signs are strung together in different discursive statements, which allow a consistent understanding of BMW to be formed. This understanding is learned as a product of marketing, repetition in advertising, public relations and design. For example,

*BMW uses visual design and styling of its cars, key rings, graphics, show rooms and communications to express it's powerful and easily recognized global brand identity. Each part of the customer's journey to purchase or experience owning or driving a BMW is carefully orchestrated to send the same messages about the brand (Allen and Simmons 2003: 114).*

## **Representation and Brands**

Representation is the use of language to convey meaning through combining signs that come to “stand for” or represent cultural artifacts (Hall 1997a). The language of brands comprises enduring and non-enduring signs that combine together into the brand code that, over time, comes to represent the brand discourse that represents the brand identity.

**Figure 4: Enduring and non-enduring brand signs**

<b>Enduring Signs</b>	<b>Non-enduring Signs</b>
<p>Are the markers of the brand discourse that are given meaning through their association with the non-enduring brand signs. The enduring signs are also markers of difference through which we can classify different brands.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- The brand name</li><li>- The sub-brand</li><li>- The product-naming system</li><li>- The brand slogan</li><li>- The brand colour</li></ul>	<p>Comprises the discursive events that are undertaken to give meaning to the enduring brand signs through representing stereotypes, images and texts in stories that over time come to represent the brand discourse and make it meaningful. The discursive events include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Advertising</li><li>- Public relations</li><li>- Visual design</li><li>- Sponsorships</li><li>- Interpersonal communications</li></ul>

Adapted from: Allen, T. and Simmons, J. (2003). *Visual and Verbal Identity*. In: **Brands and Branding**. The Economist. Bloomberg Press. New Jersey, pp. 114 – 115.

The enduring signs of the brand start off as empty signifiers devoid of meaning, but over time and through continuous association with the non-enduring signs comprising different marketing activities come to signify a meaningful discourse that defines who and what the brand represents, which differentiates it from similar offerings. The brand discourse provides the product with a given symbolic identity that enables the product to move between the physical world of goods and services and the symbolic world of signs and representation. The brand discourse is encoded within the brand code and is articulated at different points in the circuit of culture to enable the reader to interpret and understand what the brand discourse represents (duGay 1997a).

Over time the enduring and non-enduring signs give rise to the brand identity. The enduring signs are those that remain consistent over time and are repeated in association with different texts that represent the brand. The enduring brand signs comprise the brand-naming system consisting of the brand name, the slogan, the sub-

brand and product names, the brand symbol, and the brand colour. These signs differentiate the brand from similar offerings. The meanings of the enduring signs are articulated and learned through repetition in association with the non-enduring signs that enable the consumer to form a mental image of the brand discourse over a period of time, primarily through constructing and representing stories and stereotypes in marketing campaigns that draw upon other existing discourses.<sup>2</sup>

The non-enduring signs comprise the stories and stereotypes produced and represented in advertising, visual design, public relations, sponsorships and interpersonal communications that over time construct and represent the brand discourse and give meaning to the enduring brand signs.

In public health communications the non-enduring signs are constructed for a given period of time into campaigns with the intent of targeting critical intervening variables, such as knowledge, skills, self-efficacy and gender norms and values, with a view to changing or reinforcing a specific health outcome, such as practicing safer sex (Holbert & Stephenson 2003).

### **Enduring Signs – Placing the brand in the mind of the consumer**

#### *The brand name*

The brand name is a symbolic sign of the product and/or producer it represents. Brand names have denotative and connotative meanings. The brand name is the consumer's most consulted and referred-to sign in the brand code. The brand name is a symbol of the brand discourse as it has no real meaning and meaning is acquired over time through language that makes it meaningful and positions it in relation to others over time. The brand name serves the same function as that of an "author" allowing different physical goods to be symbolically grouped under the brand name (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003; Upshaw 1995; Foucault 1994b; Dyer 1996).

The brand name therefore acts as a marker of similarity by symbolically classifying the product and/or service that it represents within a similar product field or set and as a marker of difference between different producers and producers. Used in conjunction with the non-enduring brand signs, the brand name over time conjures up "connotations of effect", that represent the functional and emotional benefits offered by the brand (Aacker 1996; de Chernatony & McDonald 2003; Klein 2001;

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<sup>2</sup> The concept of enduring and non-enduring signs emerged in my discussions with Warren Parker

Baudrillard 1988). “The concept of the brand, the principle concept of advertising, summarises well the possibilities of a language of consumption... The function of the brand name is to signal the product, its secondary function is to mobilize connotations of effect” (Baudrillard 1988: 173).

The functional benefits relate to the utility benefit of the product, which is learnt through the use of the product in everyday life. However, the utility of the product is augmented with social and psychological meanings that provide an added-value, which is reflected in the images associated with the brand, and that are aimed at matching the needs, values and lifestyles of consumer, which are the emotional benefits of the brand (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003: 125). As Hall (undated<sup>4</sup>) states, “All images are encoded and decoded. An image is initially encoded with meaning when created and produced, then further encoded when the image is placed in a context or setting.” The viewer then decodes the image when it is consumed. These emotional effects are the result of past communication activities or based upon the consumer’s actual experience learnt through appropriating the brand in everyday life to express meaning or social identity (McKay 1997).

#### *Sub-brands and the product-naming system*

Sub-brands and the product-naming system differentiate between products and services produced by the same manufacturer (Allen and Simmons 2003). The meaning of the sub-brand and the product-naming system may be learnt through its relationship to the primary brand name or may be distinct from it. The Sony Walkman is an example of a sub-brand acting in unison with the primary brand. The brand name Sony acts as an indexical sign because it draws the attention of the reader to the existential relationship between Sony Corporation as the producer and the Walkman as part of other Sony products. The sub-brand Walkman is symbolic of the portable stereo player that it represents and this meaning is learnt through the marketing activities including advertising and public relations.

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<sup>3</sup> Baudrillard, J. 1988. *The System of Objects*. In: Poster, M. Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings. Polity Press. Oxford.

<sup>4</sup> accessed from

<https://www8.georgetown.edu/centers/cndls/applications/posterTool/index.cfm?fuseaction=poster.display&posterID=1754>).

However, it may also be iconic in that the meaning is associated with a particular practice associated with the use of the portable stereo player (du Gay et al 1997a). Sub-brands are used by the producer of the brand to target different products and services at the appropriate target market and to protect the brand name from the risk of damage should the sub-brand fail (Aacker 1996).

#### *The slogan, strap line or payoff line*

The brand slogan reinforces the image, identity and proposition of brand name or sub-brand. The producers of the brand use the slogan to denote the functional or emotional benefits directing the consumer towards a particular attribute or action. The slogan, like the brand name or sub-brand, provides continuity across different media and advertising campaigns (Aacker 1996; Russel and Lane 1993).

#### *Symbols or markings*

Brand symbols are indexical signs that draw attention to the brand discourse to which they refer. For example, the McDonald's golden arches draw attention to McDonald's fast-food outlets, the Nike swoosh refers to the clothing and products of the Nike corporation. The red ribbon is the international symbol for care, support and personal commitment to AIDS and a reference symbol for the global efforts against AIDS (Parker, Dalrymple & Durden 1998). The brand symbol signifies an arbitrary relationship between the sign-product and corporation, as there is no immediate connection between that being signified and the signifier namely the product or corporation. The meaning of the brand symbol is learnt over time through the use of the brand symbol in relation to the brand name that is represented and given meaning through the discursive events that represent the brand discourse (Parker et al 1998). The brand symbol reinforces the identity of the brand and captures the brand identity. It serves a primary function in linking the brand discourse (Aacker 1996). Symbols may carry deeper cultural connotations and therefore need to be checked against the dominant cultural norms and values and adapted to certain circumstances. For example, the Red Cross in Islamic states is articulated as the Red Crescent, reinforcing the relationship with the dominant religion of the Islam area and the Crescent Moon that symbolizes Islam (de Chernatony & McDonald 2003).

#### *Colour*

Colour is an indexical sign of the brand and reinforces the positioning of the brand through prompting particular images and emotions. However, it is also symbolic because colour on its own would only represent the colour that it refers to. When used in conjunction with the brand name it conjures up images associated with the brand discourse, for example the *yellow* arches of McDonalds. Selecting the colour of a brand is not merely about choosing what is contemporary, but ensuring that it is appropriate to the target audience in relation to the colour perceptions associated with age, social class, gender and religion (Gobé 2001). Dyer (1982) points out that when looking at the use of colour in advertisements it is important to relate it to culture and to what colours mean.

### **Non-enduring signs - articulating the meaning of the brand**

The meaning of the brand discourse is articulated through different marketing activities or discursive events that construct stories and stereotypes that are represented in combination with the enduring brand signs that enable the reader over time to develop an understanding of the brand discourse. These discursive events include advertising, public relations, interpersonal communication (direct marketing), sponsorships and corporate social responsibility programmes.

Kapferer cited in Upshaw (1996: p. 13) points out that "though all things are possible when a brand is first created, starting as a no-nonsense word attached to a new product, year after year, it acquires a meaning, composed of memories of the past emergent communication and products".

This allows a perception to be generated in the mind of the reader of what this phenomenon represents. The person's experience of the object will depend on the representation and knowledge of the object which allows for a cognitive type to be established in the mind of the reader (Eco 1997).

### ***Advertising***

Advertising is derived from the Latin term "advertere", which means to turn the mind towards something (Russel & Lane 1993: 23). As Roberts (1999) points out, the brand discourse constructs "stories in which people believe, and the heroes are anything from products, services, personalities and even attitudes". Advertising once emphasized differences between products, but today emphasizes differences between lifestyles and aspirations through the constructing stories that personify an imaginary

or context  
lifestyle

lifestyle (Roberts 1999). “Life styling” is the tailoring or customizing of the meanings of a product in relation to a particular target audience:

*The combination of responsive design and visual communication with techniques of market segmentation ... life styling involves tailoring or customizing a product to the lifestyle of a particular niche or target market segment (Du Gay 1997a: 66).*

This lifestyle is captured within advertising discourses that construct a stereotype of the ideal end user with a view to interpellating the audience as “subjects-for-the-product” (Althusser 1971; Dyer 1996; Alexander 1996).

In the moment of representation the lifestyle and stereotype hail us as subjects as “hey you there” by locating us in discourse. The signs, symbols, stereotypes and lifestyle not only give rise to the discourse but also enable us to distinguish it from others. Therefore the representation of the brand defines a symbolic boundary of who is included and who is excluded (Althusser 1971; du Gay 1997a; Woodward 1997).

#### *Visual design*

The lifestyles encoded within the advertisements are reinforced through its visual design that provides the brand with a desired look and feel. The design and representation of the cultural artifact are bound together by the enduring brand signs that represent the brand. “... Design produces meaning through encoding artifacts with symbolic significance; it gives functional artifacts a symbolic meaning (du Gay 1997a: 62).

#### *Public relations*

Public relations seek to manage the perceptions and strategic relationships between an organization, its internal audiences and its external audiences (Skinner et al 2001). Public relations draw attention to the product through making the issue appear as news or magazine articles (du Gay et al 1997a).

#### *Sponsorships*

Sponsorships of sporting, cultural events and personalities are strategic marketing activities that reinforce the lifestyle proposition that the producer of the brand discourse wishes to convey. Sponsorship of personalities interpellates them as bearers of the brand discourse, thereby making them icons of the brand discourse. The use of

these cultural icons within advertisements and public relations aims to further identification with the audience (Ikalafeng 2004).

#### *Interpersonal communication or direct marketing*

Interpersonal communication or direct marketing involves the use of agents or representatives to sell a given product to a designated audience. The agents become the bearers of the discourse, normally through the use of uniforms, or the prominent display of the visual and verbal signs of the brand on their clothing. Agents are chosen in relation to the meanings that the producer of the brand wishes to convey and may include meanings such as hip and cool and funky. In this manner the agents become icons of the brand through the association between them and the brand.

The word NIKE and its associated swoosh sign and slogan "Just do it" have no real meaning. Meaning of the enduring signs of NIKE have been established through the discursive events of advertising and marketing activities that enable the consumer to make the symbolic linkage between the word NIKE and its sports wear and casual clothing that are identified through the NIKE name and swoosh. The meanings of NIKE are given added impetus through the sponsorship of prominent sports stars and clubs that reinforce the lifestyle proposition and identity myth by becoming icons of the NIKE brand discourse of sport through their association with the brand. The enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand distinguish NIKE from its competitor, Adidas, that has its own set of visual and verbal signs and icons. The meaning of NIKE is therefore relational to the meaning of Adidas.

In studying the representation of the Sony Walkman, du Gay, Hall et al (1997) analyze how enduring and non-enduring signs are combined in advertisements to portray the discourse intended by Sony Corporation of the Walkman and to differentiate it from similar offerings. The naming system, for example, firmly foregrounds the Sony Walkman as belonging to that of the Sony Corporation. The visuals in the advertisements draw upon discourses of youth, mobility, individuality and love of music that propose a certain lifestyle and stereotypical end user that give rise to certain social meanings and identities associated with the use of the Sony Walkman.

## **Identity**

When studying the discourse of brands it is not possible to isolate one moment of identity. In the moment of production its producer produces the identity of the brand as “this is I”. In representation the brand hails the consumer as “hey you there”. In consumption or the appropriation of the brand discourse within everyday life by the consumer, this is expressed as “yes that’s me” or “no, that’s not me”. The adoption of this position is an expression of identification with the discourse, and the subject becomes interpellated within the discourse through the use and appropriation of the enduring brand sign in everyday life and social settings (cf. Althusser 1971).

In their study of the Sony Walkman, Du Gay, et al (1997a) do not isolate a moment of identity. Rather, identity is addressed as an integral component of the other moments within the “Circuit”. In representation they analyze how Sony combines the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand to represent the identity of the Sony Walkman in its advertisements, including the stereotypical end user and the lifestyle that the discourse of the Walkman portrays. In production they examine how the Sony Corporation gave meaning to the enduring and non-enduring signs to represent its portable cassette player through establishing the brand discourse that over time comes to stand in the mind of the consumer as a global sign that represents the brand myth. In consumption they investigate how consumers appropriate the meanings of the Walkman within everyday life to express meaning of themselves in relation to their social environment through analyzing sales and marketing figures of the Sony Walkman. In regulation they examine how the state and others tried to regulate the use of the Walkman within the public sphere.

## **Production**

Production examines the manner in which the meanings of the brand discourse are produced by the cultural industries, encoded by the cultural intermediaries and circulated through the cultural distributors.

*Meaning is produced at “economic sites” (at work, in shops) and circulated through hegemonic processes and practices (through economists’ models of how “economies” or “organisations” work, through adverts, marketing materials and the very design of products) no less than in other domains of existence in modern societies (du Gay 1997b: p. 4).*

The term “cultural industries” was coined by Horkheimer and Adorno (1944: 31) as referring to those industries “that intentionally integrates its consumers from above”. In this thesis I use this term to refer to private sector corporations, government departments, NGOs and international organizations that are involved in the production of cultural commodities, through using language and symbolism, to advance the objectives of the organization as outlined in their branding or communications strategy.

The brand or communications strategy is creatively encoded by the cultural intermediaries of marketing, advertising, design and public relations who encode these meanings into signs and symbols that come to represent the brand discourse. The cultural intermediaries are defined by Gardner and Sheppard (1989: 74) as:

*Refer to those groups of people who play an active role in promoting consumption through attaching to products and services particular meanings and lifestyles with which consumers will identify. Put simply they can be defined as people involved in the provision of symbolic goods and services. They are most frequently found in the media, fashion, advertising and design industries.*

The symbolic goods and services are represented through and within different discursive events that are circulated through the cultural distributors, such as the mass media, that provide the medium through which the meanings of the brand discourse are represented and that, over time, enables a coherent meaning of the brand to be established in the mind of the consumer. Brand discourses are engaged in a “war of position” with a view to achieving market dominance.

Production and consumption exist in a symbiotic relationship, for production cannot exist without consumption. du Gay (1997b) cites Marx’s description of the relationship between production and consumption as follows:

*Production is ... at the same time consumption, and consumption is at the same time production. Each is directly its own counterpart. But at the same time an intermediary movement goes on between the two. Production furthers consumption by creating material for the latter which otherwise would lack its object. But consumption in its turn furthers production by providing for the products the individual for which they are products. The product receives its*

*last finishing touches in consumption. A railroad on which no one rides, which is consequently not used up, not consumed is only a potential railroad ... without production, no consumption; but, on the other hand without consumption, no production; since production would then be without a purpose (1997b: 52).*

Du Gay et al (1997a) uses interviews with key figures involved in the creation of the Sony Walkman to analyze how the brand discourse of the Walkman were encoded by the Sony Corporation. They show that the Walkman and the company Sony were produced with certain deliberate meanings that were circulated through advertising, design and public relations to construct the meaning of the Sony Walkman and the manner in which these were circulated through the mass media to make it part of our cultural maps of reference.

Sony used its position within the global market to produce meaning, and then sought to establish a dominant position within the market through media synergy by combining cultural hardware, the production of the Walkman as a physical product with cultural software, the production of music required to make the Walkman function in its effort to dominate the market (Negus 1997).

Naomi Klein (2000) shows how the producers of brands use research, including “cool agents”, in an attempt to create a hegemonic position within the market place targeting young people. She argues that big brand corporations use research and/or observed trends amongst different segments of youth to encode meanings. Tommy Hilfiger, for example, draws upon popular ghetto culture to create a “look and feel” for the brand that aims to place it apart from its competitors.

## **Consumption**

In its traditional economic sense, consumption is defined as satisfying certain needs and wants through the purchase of a good or service in exchange for a given value or price. This understanding of consumption regards the consumer as being passively engaged in the exchange process where they buy what they want and the producers produce what they want (du Gay et al 1997a). As McKay (1997) points out, this school of thought does not regard consumption as a social phenomenon with which consumers do something:

*The Frankfurt School and their disciples ... argued that the expansion of mass production in the twentieth century had led to the commodification of culture, with the rise of the cultural industries. Consumption served the interests of the manufacturers seeking greater profits, and citizens became the passive victims of advertisers. Processes of standardization, they argued were accompanied by the development of a materialistic culture, in which commodities came to lack authenticity and instead merely met false needs. These needs were generated by marketing and advertising strategies and ... crucially this perspective attributed consumers to a profoundly passive role, portraying them as manipulated, mindless dupes, rather than active and creative beings (McKay, 1997).*

In cultural studies consumption is concerned with the reading or decoding of the meanings of cultural artifacts and the manner in which these are appropriated within everyday life. The consumer's interpretation of the brand discourse arises through linking together the different discursive events through which the brand discourse is represented over time. The consumer is, therefore, as active in the conferring of meaning and not merely a passive "victim" waiting to consume meanings. As Bourdieu states:

*Consumption is, in this case, a stage in a process of communication that is an act of deciphering, decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of the cipher or code. In a sense, one can say that the capacity to see (voir) is a function of the knowledge (savoir), or concepts, that is, the words, that are available to name visible things, and which are, as it were programmes for perception (1979: 1029).*

The moment of consumption, within the circuit of culture, analyses the connotative and denotative meanings that the target audience reads of the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand discourse (Dyer 1996). The connotative meanings relate to the functional or emotional benefits that the brand may fulfill for the consumer.

Through consumption, the consumer is actively engaged in attributing meaning to the brand discourse, and may appropriate the brand discourse within his/her everyday life as an expression of his/her cultural identity. The final meaning of the brand is not that which has been produced, but those that the consumer interprets and the manner in which these are manipulated within everyday life to express meaning about himself

or herself within differing social settings. A particular discourse is only effective when it is translated and taken up into social practices, for if there is no identification there is no consumption (McKay 1997).

The appropriation of the meanings of the discourse of the brand within everyday life may designate social standing and articulate a sense of identity that classifies people as members of a social group according to their taste and life style that are defined by the degree of identification or non-identification with the brand discourse (Bourdieu 1979).

Where there is a great degree of identification there is more likely to be an appropriation of the brand discourse within everyday life by the consumer than when there is a lower degree of identification. The appropriation of the meaning within everyday life gives rise to cultural identities that facilitate the formation of relationships with others, thus giving rise to social movements, which are similar to those of sub-cultures described by Dick Hebdige (1979: 1066):

*We are intrigued by the most mundane objects ..., which none the less ... take on a symbolic dimension, becoming a form of stigmata, tokens of self-imposed exile...we must seek to recreate the dialectic between action and reaction which renders these objects meaningful. For just as the conflict between Genet's "unnatural" sexuality and the policemen's legitimate outrage can be encapsulated in a single object, so the tensions between the dominant and subordinate groups can be found reflected in the surfaces of subculture – in the styles made up of mundane objects which have a double meaning ... On the other hand for those who erect them into icons, who use them as words or as curses, these objects become signs of forbidden identity, sources of value.*

Social movements arise where the members of a group share a common language through appropriating signs and symbols that signify an agreed upon meaning that repositions the signifier in relation to that which it signifies to the members of the group. In this manner the discourse of the brand acts as a symbolic boundary that defines who is included and excluded.

### **Regulation**

Regulation is the setting of rules, norms and conventions through which meanings are regulated and social life is ordered and governed. It examines the struggle for

meaning that arises between the actions of individuals and groups that give meaning to cultural artifacts and those that seek to regulate these meanings (Thompson 1997). Regulation, therefore, not only pertains to that of government policies, legislation and politics that attempt to regulate meanings, but also how meanings are regulated socially and morally. Social and moral discourses attempt to normalize specific forms of behaviour so that they become universally accepted forms of identity, practice and association and reject others as deviant or impossible.

Social life is organised according to the public and private spheres. Symbolically the public sphere signifies the universal, the collective and the rational, whereas the private sphere relates to that which is emotional and personal. Efforts to regulate meaning often arise when the meanings that are considered to be that of the private domain find expression within the public domain, especially where this pertains to topics such as sex and sexuality (Du Gay 1997a).

Regulation, therefore, examines the power structures and the actions of individuals that aim to regulate the meanings of cultural artifacts. In attempting to regulate the meanings of cultural artifacts, there is never one dominant discourse but rather a number of discourses that engage in a "war of position" in order to attain hegemony or a position of dominance:

*Hegemony involves the mobilisation of popular support by a particular social bloc for the broad range of its social projects. In this way people assent to a particular social order, to a particular system of power, to a particular articulation of the chains of equivalence by which the interest of the ruling bloc come to define the leading positions of people. It is the struggle over the popular, a matter of the articulated relations, not only within civil society (which is itself more than culture) but between the state (as a condensed site of power), the economic sector and civil society (Grossberg 1996: p. 162).*

The use of the brand discourse within everyday life by the consumer may be mediated or regulated through laws, social norms, cultural values and powerful interests. This may occur when the brand is seen to be at odds with the dominant cultural beliefs and values that are maintained through carcereal networks of power that seek to regulate meanings socially, culturally and morally.

As cultural artifacts, brands give rise to power relations between consumers (those that use and those that don't), between producers of competing products, and amongst those that attempt to regulate the meanings of the brand. In all instances there is a struggle for meaning.

### **A Methodology for Analyzing the Articulation of the loveLife Brand**

This thesis applies semiotics to examine the manner in which loveLife combines the enduring and non-enduring signs to give rise to a brand discourse that represents the loveLife “lifestyle” brand.

In studying the **representation** of the loveLife lifestyle brand, this thesis draws upon a selection of the loveLife outdoor media advertisements and print inserts undertaken in the period 2000-2006. The selection of print media inserts were drawn from a random sample of 100 copies choosing every fifth publication from the sample. The section also draws upon the loveLife print publications targeting young people aged 12 -17 namely:

- *loveFacts* a collection of three leaflets providing sexual and reproductive health behaviour
- *Tell me more* a booklet providing sexual and reproductive health behaviour for teenagers
- *Love them enough to talk about sex* a publication targeting parents on talking about sex with their youth
- *Talking and Listening: Parents and teenagers together find out how to make it easier* a publication targeting parents to talk to their youth about issues relating to HIV
- *Codi Loud and Clear: Tips on talking to your children about difficult things!*

This thesis examines the **production** of the loveLife “lifestyle” brand by examining how the meanings of the visual and verbal were encoded by loveLife to signify “its positive lifestyle” brand. It explores the processes through which the meanings of the brand were produced and the discursive events through which these meanings were circulated. It demonstrates how loveLife has attempted synergy by combining the cultural “software” of the media with the “hardware” of reproductive health and HIV prevention services for youth.

In exploring the production of the loveLife lifestyle brand, unstructured individual in-depth interviews were undertaken with key individuals involved in the design and execution of the loveLife programme in the period 2000-2002. These interviews provide valuable insight into the origins, design, development, and the organisation of work within loveLife and are therefore still valid for the purposes of this study. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed and records were kept. To examine the evolution of loveLife post-2003 this study draws upon official loveLife documentation from its website, media articles on loveLife and other academic research.

In examining **consumption** this thesis explores the interpretations that young people aged 12-20 attribute to the visual and verbal codes of commercial brands and the loveLife brand and how these meanings are appropriated by young people within their daily lives to express meaning about themselves; the symbolic boundaries that this gives rise to between those that identify and those that do not. To achieve this, six focus group discussions were undertaken involving four to eight participants per group. Using a convenience sample, four focus groups were conducted in three sites in the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal during October 2005 and two in Gauteng during March 2006.

In KwaZulu-Natal the focus group sites and participants were identified by DramAidE and all participants were members of the DramAidE school clubs and peer educators. In one site separate focus group discussions took place with boys and girls. In the other two sites, owing to time constraints, the other groups comprised both males and females.

In one site a loveLife clinic was situated within a kilometre of the school and while being members of the DramAidE Club almost all participants had participated in activities at the loveLife youth clinic. Another site was a loveLife partner school and most participants had participated in the loveLife Games. One of the schools was not located near any loveLife site and the participants had not participated in any loveLife activities.

Discussions with two remaining focus groups were undertaken in Orange Farm, Gauteng, where loveLife has a Y-Centre and a private school located in Randburg that has no interaction with the loveLife interpersonal services. Participants in Orange Farm were recruited through the local social worker. All participants had personally

experienced AIDS through either losing one or both of their parents. All but one of the participants had participated in the loveLife Y-centre located in the area owing to the distances between his place of residence and the centre.

The private school located within Johannesburg comprised only white boys and girls who had not been exposed to a loveLife programme. The intention was to conduct separate discussions with the boys and the girls. However, this was not possible owing to time constraints.

To compensate participants for their time a contribution was made towards the DramAidE Club in the schools in KwaZulu-Natal. In the peri-urban site in Gauteng the participants were provided with R50 to compensate them for their time. In the case of the private school a decision was made by the participants to donate their contributions to a charity of their choice. During the focus group discussions all participants were provided with refreshments.

In introducing the focus groups it was explained that the research was being undertaken for academic purposes and that the identity of the participants would remain confidential and that reference would only be made to their gender and geographic location. In Gauteng the same procedure was followed. However, all participants completed a consent form (see Appendix 4).

All focus group discussions were undertaken in English, which in some cases, is limiting when asking young people whose home language is not English – particularly in relation to explaining complicated marketing and personal concepts. An attempt was made to address this through requesting the DramAidE coordinator to assist where translations were required.

The focus group discussion was divided into two sections. The first section explored issues relating to the use of the mass media and commercial brands by young people within their daily lives. The second section of the focus group discussion focused on issues relating to the loveLife brand. In both instances unaided recall was used as this allows for probing around the aspects of brands that most appeal to young people. All discussions were tape recorded and transcribed.

## Summary

This thesis uses the circuit of culture to analyze the struggle for meaning between the producers of brands, consumers that consume brands and other audiences that seek to regulate the meanings of brands. Representation analyzes the manner in which the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand are combined together to give rise to the brand discourse that comes to represent a global sign in the minds of the consumer of the brand identity or myth. Production examines how the meanings of brands are produced by the cultural producers that define the brand discourse in a brand strategy that are then encoded into signs and symbols by the cultural intermediaries of advertising, public relations and design and distributed through the cultural distributors of the mass media. Consumption is not only concerned with the decoding of meanings but also with the manner in which consumers use signs and symbols in everyday life to signify meaning about themselves that mediates social relations and interaction. Regulation examines how carceral networks of power, comprising government, religious organizations and others may seek to regulate the social, cultural and moral meanings of brands and the identities these give rise to. It is argued that when studying brands as cultural artifacts it's not possible to identify a singular moment of identity but rather that identity cuts across all elements of the circuit of culture.

In applying the circuit of culture to the study of brands, this study draws upon the experience of the loveLife lifestyle brand in South Africa. It examines how loveLife has employed the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand to give rise to its brand discourse of a positive lifestyle. Through interviews with senior managers of loveLife and a review of the loveLife corporate communications, including its communications strategy, it investigates how the producers of loveLife have produced the meanings of the loveLife lifestyle brand. Focus group discussions with young people in KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng provide insight into the meanings that young people decode of the loveLife lifestyle brand and the manner in which these meanings are used by young people in everyday life to signify meaning about themselves and in so doing to facilitate social interaction. Through a review of media articles and other relevant documentation it examines how religious groups and parents have sought to regulate the social, cultural and moral meanings of the loveLife lifestyle brand.

## Chapter 4: Representing loveLife

loveLife encodes meaning into the visual and verbal codes of its brand and circulates these through its media programme that comprises an array of texts which symbolically represent the meaning of the loveLife discourse through different discursive events. These meanings are decoded by the audience, enabling them to form a mental picture of meanings and identities that loveLife represents and to appropriate these within everyday life.

Tomaselli (1996) distinguishes between inactive and active texts. The inactive text comprises the meanings that are encoded within texts by their producers and circulated. These meanings are found in the discursive events such as advertisements, newspaper supplements, radio and television programming, outdoor media, interpersonal communication strategies, small media such as pamphlets, brochures and posters that enable the consumer to build a coherent understanding of the meanings that the producer wishes to convey. The activated text is that which is decoded by the audience and consumed through the appropriation of the meanings of the text within everyday life.

Inactive texts cluster meanings that over time give rise to social identities through portraying and reflecting lifestyle scenes or scenarios. These not only reflect a given identity but also, over time, come to stand as a metaphor or a signifier of the lifestyle of a given social group (Tomaselli 1996). Representations within inactive texts are not only intended to convey meaning but also construct a social identity that tells us who we can become:

*Representation includes the signifying practices and symbolic systems through which meanings are produced and which position us as subjects. Representations produce meanings through which we can make sense of our experience and of who we are...these symbolic systems create the possibilities of what we are and what we can become. Representation as a cultural process establishes individual and collective identities and symbolic systems provide possible answers to the questions: who am I? What could I be? Who do I want to be? Discourses and systems of representations construct places from which*

*individuals position themselves and from which they can speak (Woodward 1997:14).*

These meanings and identities are constructed by cultural intermediaries comprising advertisers, programme producers and journalists that employ abstract concepts in their creative executions to give creative expression to these meanings and the social identities proposed by the cultural industries (Du Gay 1997a).

Semiotics provides a framework through which we can examine the meanings of the visual and verbal codes encoded by loveLife, the discourses it draws upon to construct meaning of the identity and the lifestyle it represents.

### **Enduring Signs – Placing loveLife in the minds of consumers**

When analyzing the loveLife brand code it is possible to discern between enduring and non-enduring signs. Enduring signs comprise the brand name - loveLife, the sub-brand – S'camto, the brand pay-off line – Talk about it and the brand colour. Non-enduring signs comprise the telling of stories by loveLife that are represented within campaigns. Campaigns comprise messages (images, stories and slogans) that are developed by communications specialists for a given period of time with the intent of targeting critical intervening variables, such as knowledge, skills, self-efficacy and gender norms and values, with a view to changing or reinforcing a specific health outcome, such as practicing safer sex (Holbert & Stephenson 2003).

#### **The brand name – loveLife**

The brand name – loveLife – is the primary sign in the brand code. As an indexical sign the brand name serves as a sign that refers to the organization that is known as loveLife. It is also symbolic and intended to conjure in the minds of young people images that relate to their futures, healthy lifestyle and aspirations (Sinclair 2002). The symbolic meaning of the brand name is developed and represented within the media which, over time, comes to signify the brand discourse that loveLife wishes to convey. As Dr Michael Sinclair, Deputy Vice-President, Kaiser Family Foundation, explains:

*The concept of the loveLife brand was an attempt to marry commercial advertising techniques with public health... We tried to put across the public health message essentially through a commercial medium. The loveLife brand*

*has the primary purpose of creating associations in the minds of young people. So it is a bridging mechanism between the brand and a sense of what the brand represents and the substance of the programme. The substance of the programme is obviously the educational aspect of the media component and the outreach programmes, which combine services and education. And the associations we hope that young people put to loveLife is an aspirational holistic lifestyle approach. So hopefully when young people see loveLife they think about their futures, they think about healthy living, they think about their aspirations and they relate to it (Interview: M. Sinclair 2002).*

The brand name has a denotative and a connotative meaning. The denotative meaning of the brand name - loveLife – refers to love life – to want to engage with one's life. Judi Nwokedi-Fortuin of the founders and the first manager of the loveLife media programme states:

*So when we sat there and nobody came up with a great idea, Connie (September) as a creative said, well, what is this all about? And I said it's about love and about life. And he said what do you want people to do about it and I said "talk about it" and that's how it came about" (Interview: Nwokedi-Fortuin 2002).*

The denotative meaning of the brand name draws upon discourses of love, which is a floating signifier open to individual interpretation as there is no singular definition of the word love. The word *life* stands in opposition to that of death, which is commonly associated with HIV. However, connotatively the slang use of the word, "*lovelife*", draws upon discourses relating to boyfriend – girlfriend relationships and the word love acts as a signifier of sex. The manner in which the word love in this context is decoded is dependent upon the non-enduring signs that give rise to the brand discourse.

### **Slogan - Talk About It**

The loveLife slogan, *Talk About it*, is an indexical phrase that directs the target audience and those that interact with them to the action that loveLife is seeking for them to undertake, which underpins the lifestyle of openness regarding sex, sexuality and gender relations that loveLife is aiming to promote.

*The loveLife lifestyle is characterized by open communication about sex, sexuality and gender relations informed through the basic tenets of informed choice, shared responsibility and positive sexuality (loveLife, 2002).*

*Talk about it* draws upon discourses of adolescent reproductive health and HIV prevention that indicate that open discussions around issues relating to sex with young people provides young people with the opportunity to make informed choices in relation to their sexual behaviour (Harrison & Steinberg 2001). Harrison and Steinberg explain that:

*The first goal of loveLife is to get all South Africans – particularly 12 – 17 year olds – talking more openly about sex, sexuality and the HIV epidemic. This goal is derived from the international experience that open communication about sex, and early sexual education is essential to delaying the onset of adolescent sexual activity, reducing teenage pregnancy, increasing condom usage and reducing HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (Harrison & Steinberg 2002),*

*Talk about it* was conceived by loveLife as an attempt to spark a national conversation about the loveLife brand, guiding the dialogue towards sex and specifically adolescent sexuality with an emphasis on inter-generational communication about sexuality (loveLife 2001):

*...Positive change requires more than a passive process of information transmission, rather it is active engagement with messaging, contextualized through personal experience and interaction across social networks that enables individuals to personalize and internalize communication (Harrison & Steinberg 2001).*

The word *it* is an open signifier. In order for *it* to have meaning requires that it be interpreted in relation to the non-enduring signs that are used to give meaning to the brand discourse that over time allows a coherent understanding to be developed of the meaning of *it*. Used in conjunction with *talk about* and the connotative meaning of the brand name, *it* implies discussions around adolescent sex and relationships are deliberately withheld. This reinforces Foucault's (1976) observation that often in discourse, sex is positioned as something that is a secret, whose discovery is immanent.

### **The loveLife sub-brand – S'camto**

*S'camto*, which means to “*talk about it*”, is the loveLife sub-brand. Denotatively S'camto draws upon the pay-off line, *talk about it*, and is an indexical sign that aims to direct the target audience to the activity that loveLife is seeking for them to undertake. Sinclair elaborates:

*The brand was sort of the mothership, if you know what I mean, so that nationally people would see loveLife on a billboard, they would see loveLife on a taxi, but how do you make that more personal? How do you bring it down to the level of the individual? And that's where the concept of S'camto specifically came from and we really only see S'camto as the primary sub-brand (Interview: M. Sinclair 2002).*

Connotatively, the sub-brand draws upon discourses of South African identity, rebellion, gangsterism and criminality. S'camto is derived from Iscamtho also known as “Tsotsi Taal” or gangster language. Iscamtho is primarily an urban-based language that is an amalgam of Afrikaans, English and a number of African languages primarily used by men in the urban areas to facilitate communication between different language groups. *Totsi Taal* is

*an amalgam of Afrikaans, English and a number of African languages, is widely spoken in urban areas, mainly by males. The word "tsotsi" means "gangster" or "hoodlum" - given the association with urban criminality - while "taal" is Afrikaans for "language".*

*Otherwise known as Iscamtho, Tsotsi Taal developed in cities and townships to facilitate communication between the different language groups. It is a dynamic language, with new words and phrases being regularly introduced ([www.SouthAfrica.info](http://www.SouthAfrica.info)).*

The use of a language of this sub-culture may symbolically exclude and result in non-identification with the sub-brand by those that do not understand the language, or identify with the norms and values of the particular sub-culture. The use of a predominantly urban-based township language may symbolically frame loveLife as an urban-based programme, which may be then seen to exclude rural youth. The use of a language that is primarily spoken by men may symbolically place the brand as intended for younger men and thus exclude women.

## **The use of colour**

Klein (2001) points out that brands draw upon colour to reinforce their identity. The colour on its own would not signify any specific meaning. The brand colour, in combination with the brand name, transforms the brand colour into a symbolic sign, drawing a connection between the organization, its products and that which it is seen to represent. The symbolic connection between the two is learnt over time and reinforced through repeated associations of the colour in relation to the brand name. loveLife uses the colours of pink, purple and lime green in combination with the brand name that act as symbolic signs that enables immediate identification with the loveLife programme:

*A bright purple train pulls into a South African village, teenagers come running. The purple colour and associated logo, "Talk about it", are emblems of loveLife, recognised by teens as a venue for sports, games and the social scene they thrive on. loveLife also offers a place for frank conversations about sex, AIDS and the choices that link them together (Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Milestones Newsletter 2002).*

The use of colour in the brand code symbolically differentiates loveLife from other HIV campaigns such as the red of Soul City and the yellow and black of the Government's Khomanani Campaign.

However, in 2005 there appears to have been a shift in the use of colour by loveLife, which undermines the already established symbolic link with the colour purple and loveLife. The shift in the use of colour is revealed thus:

*"Love Life Get Attitude is the fresh, new loveLife slogan pulsing all over our nation. You will see it on bright pink, green and yellow billboards in loxions, dorps, villages and cities. It moves right into our hearts and homes through vibey TV and radio ads ... Get Attitude."*

*(Whats Your Attitude?)*

*[www.loveLife.org.za/parents/news/article.php?uid=632](http://www.loveLife.org.za/parents/news/article.php?uid=632)*

## **The loveLife Product-naming System**

loveLife plays upon the enduring signs of the brand code to give meaning to its media products and services, thus allowing for a connection to be established between that which loveLife represents and the product.

Within the sub-brand-naming system the **brand name** is used to name services that loveLife provides, namely *The loveLife Games*, *The loveTrain*, and *the loveTours*. *The loveLife Games* are undertaken in partnership with the Department of Sports and Recreation, the Department of Education and the United Schools Sports Association of South Africa (USSASA) and comprise a year-long calendar of sports events run at district, regional and provincial level that culminate in a national “mini-Olympics”. The games include motivational sessions, life skills and sexuality education (Government of South Africa, handout). The loveLife Games are broadcast on television and are included in loveLife newspaper inserts. The use of the word *games* draws upon discourses relating to the Olympic Games, sports and fun. The association with the Olympic Games is further reinforced in its representation through the use of the icon of the Olympic torch used in conjunction with the name of the games. Together with the brand name - *loveLife* – the *loveLife Games* situate the activity as belonging to loveLife.

*The loveTrain* travels to rural towns, stopping at each town for seven days during which events are organised by loveLife. The events are organized in conjunction with selected schools and information sessions take place at the schools during the week, where students are invited to participate in events occurring at the loveTrain on the Saturday. Activities are also undertaken targeting out-of-school youth, juvenile offenders in prisons and young people in local hospitals. Events at the train include rotationary sessions where youth are provided with life skills, motivational sessions and entertainment comprising basketball and music (Interview with Rulani Mthembu, September 2002). *The loveTours* are similar to the loveTrain, comprising two mobile units that visit the rural areas of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal.

Denotatively the words *loveTrain* and *loveTours* place both as belonging to loveLife through drawing upon first part of the brand name and the word Train/Tours which foregrounds the venue and the activity. The train and vehicles are painted in the loveLife colours and prominently display the brand name that combines to symbolically communicate that they belong to loveLife. It also draws upon the connotative meaning of the brand name as it could stand for a place where young people would learn more about relationships and sex.

loveLife uses indigenous versions of its payoff-line to name products that are aimed at young people and to foreground the programme as something that is

distinctly South African. *ThetaJunction* is the name used to represent the loveLife helpline, combining together the Nguni word *Theta*, meaning to talk with the English word *Junction* that suggests a place of convergence. This helps to signify the denotative meaning of its helpline as a converging venue where young people can come to “talk about it”. *Theta* was also used to name one of the loveLife print media supplements *ThetaNathi*, meaning “talk to us”, produced in conjunction with the Independent Newspaper Group.

In this instance the signifier, *ThetaNathi*, *ThetaJunction* and *S'camto* (see below) will remain empty and meaningless to those who do not share access to the language from which these words are taken. Meaning can only be established if loveLife invests in making this known through its representation of the brand discourse that enables a coherent understanding to be developed.

loveLife uses its payoff line, *Talk about it*, to name small media products comprising booklets and pamphlets. The booklet - *Tell me more* – draws upon the word *tell* which is related to the word *talk*. It is only through talking that one could tell someone something. The word *more* implies that not everything is being said and that something is being withheld, which *loveLife* will reveal. In its own words:

*More about what? Well, life of course – sex and loving, and prevention and all the other stuff most parents don't talk about. So what do we do? Wait around for our culture to change and adults to tell us everything? Uh huh. Time to get real and get our own information don't you think? Times are different from when our parents were young (and their world was different from their parents' world) Anyway this world is ours, so we may as well find out what makes it go around ...*

*This booklet is to whet your appetite for more information from loveLife. We want to talk about it all. What makes us so curious about drugs? What is date rape? Why is there so much fuss about gender? How do we prevent violence? We plan to dig deep and get real so that we can be hip, informed and wise. So stay tuned and stay in touch (Tell Me More, loveLife).*

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<sup>5</sup> Nguni commonly refers to a group of languages spoken in southern Africa including Zulu, Xhosa, SiSwati, Phuthi and Ndebele (both Southern Ndebele and Northern Ndebele) (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguni>).

In the above extract parents are directly foregrounded as withholding the secrets of sex from young people. loveLife, on the other hand, positions itself as an older brother or sister or adult that will tell it all. Adults are seen as not understanding the world in which young people reside, which loveLife does. This contradicts the stated objective of the programme to encourage parent-to-child communication and rather encourages young people to find their own information.

However, in addressing parents, sex is treated more explicitly: the publication, *Love them enough to talk about sex* foregrounds the action that loveLife wants parents to undertake, namely to engage in a discussion with young people around sex. However, the term “love them enough” implies that parents do not love their children “enough”, like loveLife does. *Talking and listening: Parents and teenagers together* takes talking about sex further, emphasizing the need for parents to listen, but again reference to sex is removed and sex is again confined to the status of secrecy. This secrecy is further reinforced through the title *Tube Talk: Loud and Clear, Tips on talking to your children about difficult things* where the word “things” stands as a signifier for sex and other issues relating to young people.

The positioning of parents in relation to their children by loveLife may result in loveLife alienating parents who feel that loveLife transgresses the boundaries of that which is considered private and to be discussed in the confines of the home and that which is to be discussed in public. Parents may regard the connotative meanings of the parental – child relationships as offensive. As Qunta writes:

*Why does loveLife believe that offending parents across the racial and class divide can help reduce the transmission of HIV in teenagers ... Why does loveLife want to teach parents how to talk to their children when they offend such parents by running ads that run counter to the moral and cultural values that parents teach their children in the home (Qunta, 2002).*

In its product-naming system there is a tension between that which the payoff line is seeking to bring about, namely to encourage youth and parent conversations on issues relating to sex, and loveLife’s positioning of parents as withholding information and not revealing all they know.

The loveLife sub-brand *S’camto* is used within the loveLife product-naming system. *S’camto Print* was the name of the print media insert produced in partnership

with the *Sunday Times* until approximately 2002. *S'camto Print* was replaced by *ThetaNathi* until 2005 when loveLife resumed using *S'camto* and renamed *ThetaNathi* to *S'camto Uncut*. loveLife thereby brought the youth publication back into the fold of the sub-brand. The positioning of loveLife as a friend to the youth that will lift the veil of secrecy being upheld by adults is reinforced in the name *S'camto Uncut* as the word *Uncut* relates to discourses pertaining to regulation and censorship, reinforcing the implication that something is being withheld from young people.

*S'camto groundBREAKERS* was used by loveLife as the name for its reality-based television programme and is also used to “brand” its corps of youth volunteers responsible for much of its interpersonal communications outreach work. The *groundBREAKERS* are selected by loveLife according to set criteria to sell the loveLife message to young people (loveLife, undated<sup>6</sup>; Harrison & Steinberg 2002). The *groundBREAKERS* are branded in uniforms that bear the enduring signs of loveLife, namely the brand name and the term *groundBREAKERS*, thus enabling them to be placed in the identity of loveLife and becoming symbolic bearers of that which loveLife represents. The branding of the *groundBREAKERS* constructs these young people as texts of the social identity that loveLife is wishing to portray. The branding of the *groundBREAKERS* also places them apart from loveLife’s youth volunteers or *Mphintsi*<sup>7</sup>, thus creating a caste system. The word *groundBREAKERS* suggests that loveLife’s youth corps is breaking new ground by talking to young people about “it” – that which is being withheld by those who are not *groundBREAKERS* – namely adults.

### **Constructing spaces as text**

The loveLife enduring signs are represented on all the loveLife media products and are prominently displayed at its services comprising youth centres, youth-friendly clinics, mobile and rail programmes, sports and cultural events. The use of these signs in relation to the products and services enables the consumer to place these within their minds under the loveLife umbrella and to recall past images and graphics which enables them to construct a given social identity that comes to be associated with loveLife. The use of the enduring signs at its service delivery sites symbolically

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<sup>6</sup> loveLife. Undated. loveLife South Africa’s National HIV Prevention Programme for Young People

<sup>7</sup> Mphintsi refers to the loveLife youth peer educators who are volunteers and unlike the *S'camto Groundbreakers* are not provided with a stipend and do not receive uniforms although they may get T-shirts from loveLife.

frames these spaces, places and those that frequent them as texts that physically represent the social identities that loveLife represents through its representation of youth.

In the naming system of its adolescent sexual and reproductive health services loveLife draws upon discourses relating to youth - loveLife Y-centres and the National Adolescent Youth Friendly Clinics thus reinforcing the notion that these are spaces for youth through the letter "Y" and the word "youth".

*loveLife Y-centres:* There are 15 *Y-centres* spread across the country that combine entertainment with the provision of adolescent sexual health services and education.

*loveLife Y-centres are the embodiment of loveLife's lifestyle for young South Africans. Located mainly in poor peri-urban and rural communities Y-centres are designed as multi-purpose recreational and educational venues, fun places for young people to come together without fear or prejudice. The youthful cultural vibe of these centres makes them hugely popular among young people." (Altman, 2002)*

The use of the letter "Y" acts as a signifier for youth, and draws upon other popular local youth brands that used the letter "Y" such as Y-FM, a popular youth radio station in Gauteng, and Y-magazine prior to the creation of loveLife. Nuttal (2006) points out that the use of the letter "Y" in South Africa signifies a new generation asserting its own style and identity in relation to generation X that fought in the anti-apartheid struggle. The association with these brands reinforces the positioning of loveLife as a programme for young people. Y-FM and loveLife formed a partnership agreement when loveLife was established in 1999 (Ramlutchman & Moodley, 2003). *Y-Magazine* advertises in almost every edition of the loveLife youth supplements. The use of these brands reinforces the symbolic boundary of the urban, township-based culture as both of these brands are associated with the urban youth culture. This may reinforce the notion of loveLife being seen as a predominantly urban youth brand.

The naming of its programmes offered at the Y-centres draws upon discourses pertaining to health and youth culture. Within the Y-centre there is the *Vitality Centre* that refers to a clinic operated by a *Vitality Provider* (Nurse). Services offered at the Vitality Centre include contraception, pregnancy testing, treatment for STIs, and voluntary testing and counselling for HIV/AIDS (Naidoo 2002). The word *vitality* not

only draws upon discourses of health and good living but in the context of South Africa also refers to the lifestyle and leisure programme offered by one of South Africa's foremost health insurers – Discovery Health.

The *Cyber Y*-programme is a computer-training programme that draws upon discourses of youth culture and the computer culture. The word *cyber* relates to cyber café's where people can access the web and use computers (Naidoo 2002).

In addition to these services, loveLife provides an array of recreational activities for young people including basketball lessons in different styles of dances, karate, aerobics, drama, art and design, a radio studio and undertakes outreach to schools in the surrounding areas (Naidoo 2002).

*LoveLife's National Adolescent Friendly Clinic Initiative (NAFCI)* being undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health comprises accredited youth-friendly clinics located within existing government health centres, that meet predetermined criteria that enable them to be called "*youth friendly clinics*". The youth clinics provide adolescent health services including treatment for sexually transmitted infections, HIV testing and counseling, pregnancy testing, life skills, and a motivational and recreational programme for young people. Within the adult section of the clinic a space is provided for the loveLife Groundbreaker to discuss issues relating to sex and sexuality with the youth (Altman, 2002; Delate, 2003, Stewart-Buchanan, 2005). The use of the word "youth" foregrounds it as a clinic intended for young people. The word "friendly" stands in opposition to "unfriendly" and implies that services not displaying this name are not friendly towards the needs of young people.

The Y-centers and the clinics are painted in the loveLife colours and prominently display the brand name, which enables the audience to place these services as belonging to loveLife.

### **Non-enduring Signs - Articulating the meanings of loveLife**

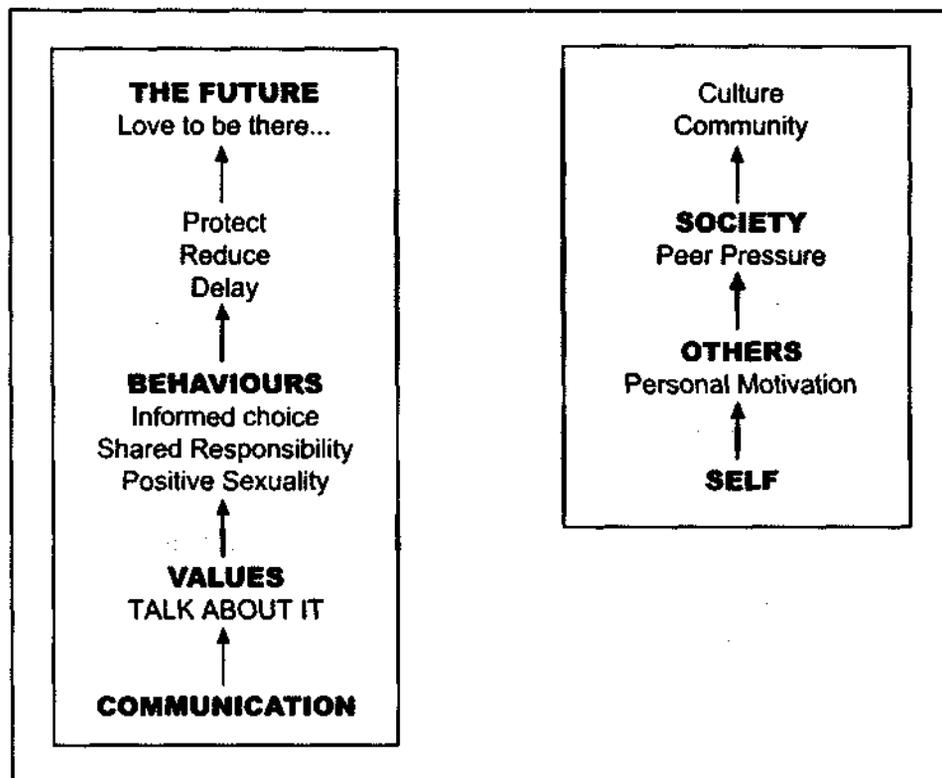
#### **Campaigns – representing the loveLife discourse**

loveLife has undertaken a number of campaigns that may be described as sequential and specific. The enduring signs are prominently displayed in the representation used to place these campaigns within the minds of the consumer as belonging to loveLife.

Over time the representation used in loveLife’s campaigns enables a coherent picture to be formed in the minds of the readers of the discourse that loveLife represents, which comes to stand for its brand identity.

The **sequential campaigns** comprise different specific themes that relate to adolescent sexual and reproductive health intended to lead the target audience over a period of time to a certain outcome (loveLife 2002). The loveLife Communications Strategy (2002) depicts the evolution of the loveLife campaign in the period 1999 – 2004 as follows:

**Figure 5: The evolution of the loveLife mass media campaign 1999 – 2004**



Source: Adapted from loveLife Communications Strategy 2002: Informing loveLife’s Multi-media campaign

loveLife’s campaigns were launched in 1999 with a teaser campaign that ran for three months using a series of billboards entitled “*Foreplay*” that aimed to create anticipation and curiosity. The design was sexually provocative and incorporated images of popular youth icons, musicians and celebrities. “*Foreplay*” was followed by the “*Reveal*” campaign with the loveLife brand name prominently displayed across the face of the “*Foreplay*” billboards. The strategy is explained thus:

*During the first year loveLife focused on creating awareness of the loveLife brand and message. It did this using a massive, national, multi-media awareness campaign in four phases. The campaign started with a 'teaser' called foreplay designed to create anticipation and curiosity. This was followed a month later with a 'reveal' campaign, consisting of the loveLife brand prominently displayed across the face of the Foreplay billboards (Stadler & Hlongwa 2002: p. 368).*

The words *foreplay* and *reveal* are more aligned to the connotative meanings of the brand name. Denotatively the word *foreplay* and *reveal* suggest that loveLife is teasing the audience and that it will reveal all. *Foreplay* has strong connotative meanings that are more aligned to the connotative meaning of the brand name, suggesting activities leading up to sexual intercourse. *Reveal* is similar to the use of *it*, suggesting that something is being withheld from the target audience and that loveLife intends to expose all of it.

The second phase was aimed at "creating the hook" and was designed to create intrigue and to introduce the loveLife payoff line "*talk about it*" through incorporating sexually provocative messages in its outdoor media advertisements such as *Oral Sex; Use Your Mouth* and *The Naked Truth*. *Oral Sex/Use Your Mouth* relates to the reduced risk of HIV transmission associated with oral sex, while the *naked truth* suggests that loveLife will talk about sex openly which is currently being concealed by clothing. During this component of the campaign loveLife launched its first television programme *Jika Jika*, which is derived from "Tsotsi Taal" (to go around) (Nwokedi-Fortuin & Harrison 2001; Stadler 2001; Stadler & Hlongwa 2002). To "go around" has sexual connotations that suggest promiscuity, which is often incorrectly associated as a cause of HIV, which may reinforce stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV being seen as promiscuous and therefore deserving of HIV.

Phase III introduced the loveLife payoff line and the sub-brand *S'camto*, which was used as the name for its second television. The outdoor media component of this campaign depicted statements by young people such as a fourteen-year-old girl *What happens if the condom comes off inside of me; I had sex, will I die?; I had sex with an older man* and *All my boyfriends want sex*. The displaying of these messages on billboards were intended to create a shock factor that would encourage parents to talk

to their children about issues relating to sex (Nwokedi-Fortuin & Harrison 2001; Stadler 2001; Stadler & Hlongwane 2002).

The notion of sex and death used in this series of billboards re-invokes early AIDS messaging that sought to use fear-based messaging. However, fear-based messaging has long been discounted as an effective HIV prevention strategy.

*Fear appeals that are designed to change behaviours in 'unconverted' populations result in a process of motivated reasoning that discounts the source information, message information and message relevance, making them ineffective and potentially dangerous (Batrouney 2004).*

Phase IV had as its theme "The future ain't what it used to be", which coincided with the International AIDS Conference that took place in Durban in 2000. This campaign aimed to make a connection to the future and encouraged people to talk about the future (Stadler & Hlongwa 2002).

*This is about sex, the future is not what it used to be but you can shape your future, how do you shape your future. Through adopting a positive lifestyle what does it mean - informed choice, shared responsibility and healthy sexuality (Harrison & Nwokedi-Fortuin 2001).*

In Phase V the themes of informed choice, shared responsibility and positive sexuality were introduced to focus the discussion on sex. Informed choice aimed to encourage young people to seek accurate knowledge to guide their decision-making. This aspect of the campaign was illustrated through the choices campaign where the outdoor media component of loveLife used a multiple-choice format built around sexual oppositions: *Climax / Anticlimax; Drop Dead Gorgeous / The Drop; Score / Red Card* (Harrison & Nwokedi-Fortuin 2001; loveLife 2002). These words represent a play on words that assume that the target audience has an understanding of the terms and the connotative meanings that are being employed. For example, *score* may mean either scoring a goal or it may mean getting sex. *Red Card* in football relates to being sent off the pitch for an offence but in this context could also mean getting a sexually transmitted infection or even HIV symbolized through the word red which, in turn, may also conjure up images of death. The term *drop dead gorgeous* has gender connotations as it is often employed to refer to a desirable woman. However, in the context of HIV it may invoke death referring to someone beautiful as dying from

AIDS. This is reinforced through the term *drop* - a slang term referring to a penile or vaginal discharge often related to a Sexually Transmitted Infection.

Shared responsibility aimed to highlight the benefits of people treating themselves and others with respect, dignity and love. The outdoor media reflected simulacrums of popular brands such as a box of chocolates with the words Respect; a perfume bottle with the word "dignity" written on it and the *His & Hers* billboards (Nwokedi Fortuin 2001b; Stadler & Hlongwa 2002; loveLife 2002; Irwin 2006).

Positive sexuality aimed to promote the value of a better understanding of one's sexuality, where and when "sex" might fit into the picture, anatomy, gender relations, visiting a clinic, etc. The campaign was about an expression of the self, self-confidence and good self-esteem, translating into a positive affirmation of one's place in the world. *S'camto Print* (20 January 2002) describes the campaign as being designed to make young people think about their lives, their sexuality and their happiness. This campaign led with the messages of *Do You Say What You Feel?; Love Yourself Enough?; Happy Together? At Peace With Yourself? Feel Good About Who You Are?* (loveLife 2002; S'camto Print 2002).

Phase VI of the strategy focused on promoting the specific behavioural choices of delay, reduce and protect. According to loveLife this is similar to the abstain, be faithful, condomise strategy, but the loveLife strategy is different as these behaviours are shaped within the "holistic/lifestyle context" of informed choice, shared responsibility and positive sexuality, while all the time continuing to promote *Talk About It* (loveLife 2002). "Delay" addresses issues around delaying the age of sexual debut, delaying casual unprotected sex, delaying experimenting with drugs, alcohol and risky behaviour. "Reduce" relates to reducing multiple sexual partners, casual unprotected sex, transactional sex, non-consensual sex, non-informed decision-making and risky behaviours. "Protect" aims to encourage young people to take action, to protect the future, friends, family, community and people living with HIV/AIDS (loveLife 2002).

Delay, reduce and protect were illustrated through a number of creatives involving young people. One featured two young people naked in bed with the words *No Pressure* denotatively intended to signify abstinence. Another featured the back of a man with the hands of women all over his body with the message *Everyone he's slept*

*with is sleeping with you*; and another depicting a women and a man in an embrace, with the women holding a condom and with the slogan *One roll-on all women want*.

Phase VII focused on the future with the concept of "*Love to be there*", combining concepts of responsible personal relationships and future aspirations implying personal responsibility for one's behaviour and the need for individual initiative in accomplishing life's goals (loveLife 2004). The outdoor component of this campaign depicted a young boy and girl holding a football with the slogan – *Love to be there 2010* – drawing upon the future hosting by South Africa of the 2010 Soccer World Cup.

#### **loveLife Campaigns Post 2004**

In 2005 loveLife launched a new campaign called *Get Attitude*. The denotative meaning of the Get Attitude payoff line is described by loveLife as:

*It only makes sense that loveLife advocate a positive attitude as this is what we are all about. Reality is: a lot of young people indulge in risky sexual behaviour (unprotected sex) because they have a negative attitude towards life. If young people approached life with a positive attitude, don't you think they would adopt an attitude that is of self-awareness and would not need to indulge in risky behaviour just to gain approval from their peers – that is peer pressure (www.loveLife.org.za).*

The denotative meaning of this campaign draws upon discourses of a positive attitude, which is linked to the aspirational nature of the brand that aims to promote a positive lifestyle focusing on sex, sexuality and gender.

The phrase *Get attitude* in its connotative meaning draws upon discourses relating to youth that imply opposition to those in positions of authority, such as parents and peers, as reflected in this comment:

*Maybe I'm a little slow, I dunno, but I don't really understand loveLife's get attitude slogan. What is it supposed to mean? If someone has attitude ...that doesn't have positive connotations ... (Jozi Girl 2006)*

The connotative meaning of the payoff line is similar to that of the sub-brand S'camto that draws upon "Totsi Taal" - a language that is associated with rebellion. *Get Attitude* may place loveLife in an oppositional relationship to those who regulate adolescent sexual behaviour in particular parents, teachers and religious leaders.

Semiotically, the slogan therefore may have an unintended effect of alienating this audience rather than encouraging them to engage in a national discussion.

The *Get Attitude* slogan and the denotative meaning euphemistically suggests that by getting a positive attitude one would necessarily be able to prevent HIV infection. It again reinforces the notion that HIV infection is gotten by “those” people who have a negative attitude in life, and may by implication result in people living with HIV being regarded as having “negative” attitudes. HIV infection may not be the outcome of an individual decision – a negative attitude - but may be the result of the political, cultural, socio-economic, gender and religious environments that have an important bearing on the manner and context in which sex takes place, which may impact on the ability of the individual concerned to prevent HIV infection. As the UNAIDS Communication Framework points out:

- *Seeking to influence behaviour alone is insufficient if the underlying social factors that shape the behaviour remain unchallenged. Many communications and health promotion programmes proceed on the assumption that behaviour, alone, needs to be changed, when in reality, such change is unlikely to be sustainable without incurring some minimum of social change. This necessitates attention to social environmental contexts (UNAIDS/Penn State 1999).*

The slogan may further contribute towards stigma and discrimination by suggesting that people who are living with HIV have a negative attitude towards life and may symbolically frame the programme as one that is only intended for people with a positive attitude and who are not living with HIV.

In 2005 loveLife introduced the payoff line *Born Free* as part of its Get Attitude Campaign. Denotatively in the South African context *Born Free* signifies youth born in the post-apartheid era (*Mail & Guardian* 2006). The denotative meaning of *Born Free* is defined by the loveLife website as follows:

*Building on the concept of a Born Free generation of young South Africans, the new billboard series evokes the activism of the struggle days by urging*

*today's youth to "take back the future" and "embrace life" in the struggle for an AIDS-free generation (loveLifes).*

*Born Free* used in the context of HIV has different connotations. *Born Free* suggests that HIV is something that comes from the outside to infect those who are *free*, referring by extension to those who do not have HIV. This connotation may implicate those living with HIV as being responsible or *guilty* of bringing HIV in. This may unintentionally reinforce stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV, who in this context are regarded as intentionally spreading HIV because they are not *free* of the virus (Benson 1997).

*Born Free* implies that HIV infection is a consequence of individual decision-making. A woman may be born free of HIV but through rape or the power relations within a relationship may not be able to necessarily remain HIV free. A child that is born with HIV does not choose to be born with HIV and this may not even be the decision of the parent concerned, especially if the treatment that reduces the chance of HIV infection is not readily available.

The meaning of *Born Free* stands in relation to its opposite of that being oppressed, and may inadvertently reinforce the notion that people born or living with HIV are oppressed or shackled by the virus, thereby reinforcing the traditional notions of HIV prior to the advent of treatment. The payoff line may also impact negatively on the use of loveLife facilities by young people living with HIV, who may regard these as spaces only intended for the *AIDS-Free Generation*, thereby drawing a symbolic boundary between those youth living with and those not living with HIV. The question arises therefore, what are the criteria for the AIDS-free generation?

*Born Free* used in conjunction with discourses of an AIDS-Free Generation and the payoff line *Get Attitude* and discourses relating to positive and negative attitudes is similar to early discourses surrounding the epidemic that were designed to invoke moral panic and that contributed to the initial stigma and discrimination surrounding the epidemic. One element of a

*moral panic that dominated the early period of the AIDS epidemic can be related to the ways in which HIV was coded not only as an infectious disease –*

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8 ([www.loveLife.org.za/parents/news/article.php?uid=707](http://www.loveLife.org.za/parents/news/article.php?uid=707)).

*something that someone else gave you – but also as a sexually transmitted one, associated not so much with blood and blood products as with stigmatized sexual and social practices...a second theme undoubtedly related to the first, is the image of AIDS and HIV coming from 'the outside' to infect hitherto healthy persons or populations. Sometimes the 'outside' is a place ...sometimes the outside is irresponsible others (Benson 1997:153 – 154).*

Therefore an unintended consequence that may result from this campaign is increased stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV. It is seen as having a negative attitude of being ensnared, but also of not being included in the loveLife realm.

### **Interpellating young people – constructing the stereotype of youth**

Representation creates in the minds of the audience a picture of the identity that is associated with a particular cultural artifact through presenting stereotypes that come to stand for the meanings that the particular cultural artifact wishes to convey. The use of stereotypes aims to interpellate the audience to take up the offer being presented to become part of the discourse.

loveLife draws upon discourses of the rainbow nation. The term “rainbow nation” was first coined by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who used it as a metaphor to describe the coming together of the different race groups in post-apartheid South Africa. The use of the rainbow nation discourse by loveLife creates a homogenous picture of South African youth identity that glosses over the differences in sexual experience, socio-economic status and race and consumption (Parker 2004).

loveLife’s representation of young people aims to establish in the minds of young people and other audiences that the programme deals with adolescent sex and sexuality. Twelve of the twenty publications reviewed for this study contained front covers that represent young people within sexual contexts. The front cover representations of youth draw upon the main theme of the lead article and are expanded upon within the lead article.

### **Representations of Adolescent Sexuality**

The use of sex by loveLife is aimed at capturing the attention of its target audience:

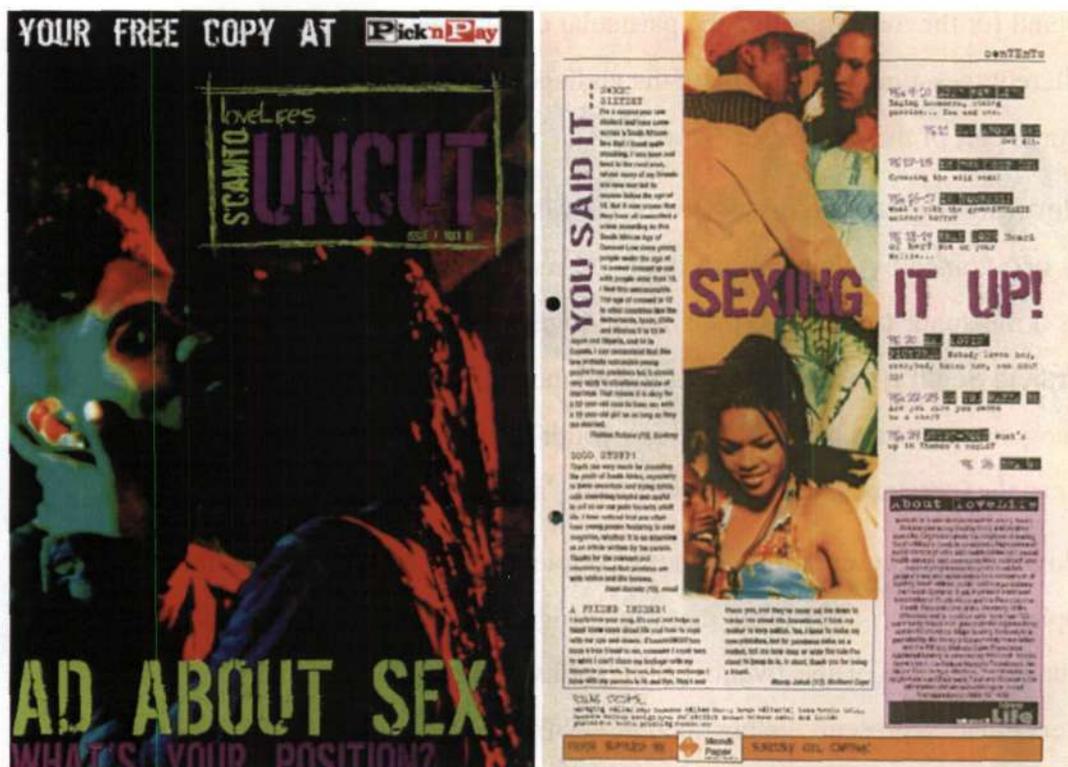
*If you look at loveLife, loveLife messages and loveLife images you have to locate that within an advertising world in South Africa and you have got to*

*assess loveLife's images vis-à-vis those images because if you find fault with what loveLife is doing then you must find fault with TAG Heuer, Guess Jeans ... if everything was not promoting sex, loveLife would be in a different situation (Nwokedi-Fortuin, 2002)*

Representations and discussion of sex in the context of AIDS are necessary for HIV transmission occurs primarily through sex. However, such representations need to foreground safer sex messages that direct the target audience to the desirable action. The representation of adolescent sexuality in the images used by loveLife fails to foreground messages of safer sex - rather, loveLife may be seen to be promoting sex as something that is cool.

The title of *S'camto Uncut*, Issue 7, May 10 is *Mad about Sex: What is your Position.*

**Figure 6: S'camto Uncut. Mad about sex. Issue 7. May 10**





The lead picture shows a boy and girl in a moment of passion in what appears to be a nightclub. The young male seems to be distracted by something he is looking at. The inner title on the page of contents is *Sexing it up*. The title of the lead article is *Lust 4 Life*. The word *lust* in relation to the imagery and text signifies sexual lust rather than the craving for life. The image introducing the lead article is a repetition of that on the front cover. However, this time there is a girl standing in the foreground looking at the young male with what appears to be her shoulder or breast pointing to the young male. Denotatively these images refer to discourses pertaining to casual and transactional sex. This meaning is foregrounded through the words that enter the picture “all the ladies were drooling over him, maybe because he was one of the richest dudes here”. Within the imagery there is no connection to safer sex.

Within the lead article certain words are bolded in red that act as a subversive code, drawing the attention of the reader to a story within the story:

*To the street bash ... picked up ... my sex mad teenage years... hot under the collar and horny ... their eyes sparkled with freedom ... I wouldn't mind touching those muscles ... The booze was flowing ... drooling over him ... I lie to her ... Quick shag in the car ... I was happy to find my own way home.*

Within the story teenagers are depicted as *sex mad*, *hot* and *horny* – sex is equated with *freedom*. The word “freedom” stands in contrast to restriction. The story introduces the element of alcohol. “I lie to her” relates to the theme of multiple concurrent partnerships implying that the character lies to his girlfriend about what he is doing. “Quick shag in the car” implies casual sex. Notably there is no reference made to safer sex within the subversive code being offered.

In the lead article itself reference to HIV is made later in the sixteenth paragraph where the writer is conversing with a male acquaintance.

*Of course, Mr. Casanova had an explanation, saying that he's cool with the whole deal since it goes both ways. “I have a girlfriend and we've been together for years, I love her to bits, but these kids want to have a little fun, so why not? They want their friends to see them with us and talk about it at school. To be fair, to be honest, its tit for tat – we pay, they get on their*

*backs.” Excuse me but don’t we have to worry about HIV and AIDS?  
(S’camto Uncut Issue 1 May 10)*

The second last paragraph of the article also includes a reference to AIDS:

*So a few geeks and me were left behind to think about just how crazy this scene really is. Teenagers looking to be cool are abandoning all morals and putting their lives on the line. Eish, when will we wake to the reality of AIDS. Was I just being a prude because nobody picked me up? Maybe, but at least I had a chance to think about the insanity of what I had experienced (S’camto Uncut, Issue 1 May 10).*

Denotatively the article addresses a number of themes namely casual sex and multiple concurrent partnerships. However, while the text suggests an element of intergenerational and transactional sex, the graphics suggest that young people of the same age are engaging in sex. This stands in contrast to the epidemiological evidence of the risk behaviours driving the epidemic, namely longer-term multiple concurrent partnerships between older men and younger women (SADC 2005). Connotatively the imagery and the text surrounding the article suggest that sex is cool. The cool people got picked-up, the cool people are abandoning their morals and were having sex, and the *geeks* were left behind because they were not cool enough. The author of the text then questions whether his/her response to the situation was not owing to the fact that she was being prudish and by implication a *geek*.

The gender dimensions suggest that girls are sexual objects for the gratification of men – the male in the article is called Mr. Casanova. By implication this implies that he has more than one partner, which aligns to the discourse of multiple concurrent partnerships, and girls are regarded as sexual objects that could be bought to get “on their backs”, thus suggesting that girls are passive sex objects.

loveLife’s representations of adolescent sex positions sex as something that is “cool” and something in which all young people are engaging, and the connotation of *mad about sex* is repeated within loveLife’s discourse of youth sexuality.

*Is it normal to think about sex so much? Yes, Yes, Yes, sex is on our minds and in the air. Sex is going to be part of our lives. Thank you bodies, thank you hormones, this can be such fun. You're not sex mad - well may be you probably are, but that's just one of the joys of life. One day you will have to*

*grow up and think about paying bills, feeding children, earning a living. Think about sex - stretch it out while you have the time (loveFacts (a)).*

In the following excerpt from *ThetaNathi* sex is equated as something that is entertaining and fun-loving, to be consumed as a consumer product and with contraceptives providing the same degree of safety as a PlayStation, the Internet or a CD-rom. The identity suggested here is that by aspiring to a middle-class consumerist position, it would serve as a social vaccine for protection against HIV.

*Let's face it, the 21<sup>st</sup> century is pretty damn cool! What with CD's, the Internet, cell phones, and cryogenics (just kidding!) our lives are becoming longer, more entertaining, fun-lovin' and safer! But there are a few inventions that have been around for longer than a PS2 that give us maximum fun with minimal risk – contraceptives! We look at the power of the pill, the call of the condom and what you think about them (ThetaNathi Issue 6).*

While the imagery and text may position sex as something that is cool, references to safer sex are made within the text of its publications. Contraceptives, while being referred to in the text, also include non-barrier methods that do not offer protection against HIV infection. The assumption here is that loveLife takes for granted that a young person reading this magazine will read each and every article. For example, Issue 1, May 10 edition of *S'camto Uncut*, "Mad about Sex", introduces the need for safer sex in a later article on page 7 under the title "*I am a sex bomb*":

*Well first off, we need to know that by having sex, we're putting ourselves at risk. A 15-year old South African has a 50/50 chance of getting HIV – that's a major risk! But then you are even more likely to get pregnant or make somebody pregnant. And there are a whole range of very nasty sexually transmitted diseases, other than HIV. Point is casual sex is very high risk. You should wait until you are in a long-term, loving relationship before the issue of sex even comes up – and then, even though you may be a virgin, and you trust your partner completely, always! Say it again, ALWAYS – use a condom.*

The advice given here stands in strong contrast to the imagery and text that have preceded the article, which positions sex as something that is cool and something that everyone is doing.

The images of youth on the front covers of loveLife's youth publication are contrasted with those represented that attend loveLife's programmes. These are youth participating in everyday social activities under the loveLife brand. In most instances these images are placed on the inner back pages of its youth publications, relegating their importance in relation to the images on its front cover and symbolically reinforcing the notion of the "cool" people on the front and back pages who are having sex and enjoying their lives, as opposed to those participating in loveLife activities.

Unintended effects may arise from the manner in which loveLife represents young people. Unintentional effects concern the unintentional and undesirable consequences that may result from the diffusion of social messages, which recognizes that sometimes communications and marketing activities develop messages but that the decoding by the target audience may be the opposite to that intended by the producer of the message (Piotrow 1997; Singal & Rogers 1999).

The representation of adolescent sexuality as something that is cool may have the unintended effect of increasing peer pressure on young people to engage in sex. The ambiguous references to, and its failure to foreground safer sex as part of its representation, may unintentionally increase the vulnerability of young people to HIV infection. The representations of a sexualized youth may symbolically construct loveLife as excluding those young people who do not identify with the highly sexualized images of young people contained in its representation.

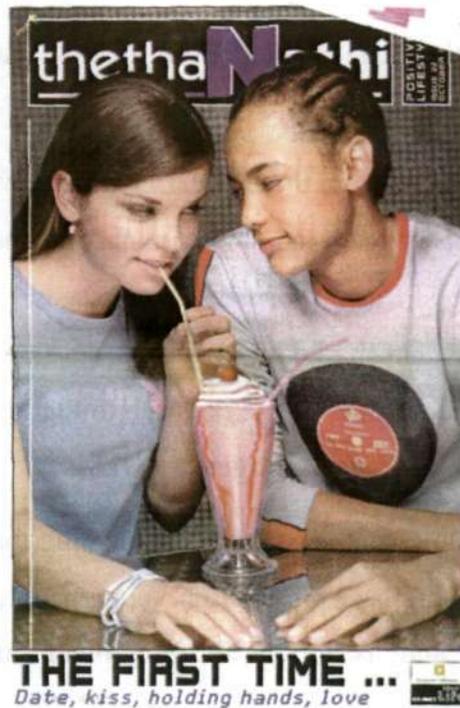
### **Representations of Gender**

Gender relates to the socially defined roles of males and females that are socially constructed and learned collectively and individually:

*Gender can be defined as the opportunities, roles, responsibilities, relationships, and personal identities a particular society prescribes as proper for women and men. These attributes are socially constructed and learned both individually and collectively. Gender roles are influenced by many other determinants, such as race, culture, community, time, ethnicity, occupation, age, and level of education. While sex may be biologically determined, gender is socially defined (UNAIDS 1999: p. 38).*

ThetaNathi Issue 22 has its theme *The First Time, Date, Kiss, holding hands, love* which is reflected in the text on the front cover. The front cover image depicts a boy and a girl sharing a milkshake. Denotatively this graphic may relate to themes of delaying the onset of sex or it could relate to reducing the number of sexual partners.

Figure 7: ThetaNathi. The first time, date, kiss, holding hands, love. Issue 22

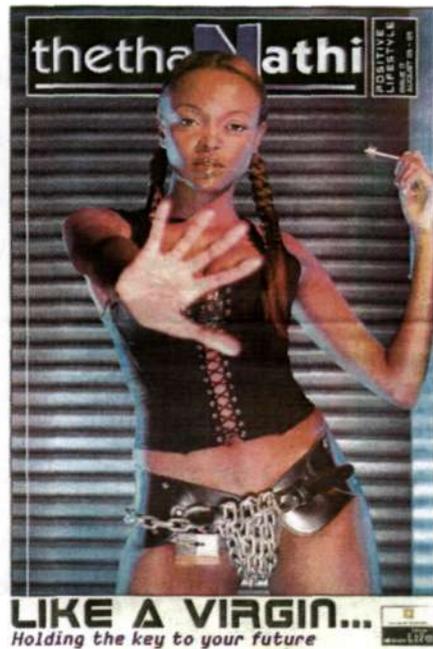


Within the image there are icons that again act as a subversive code and that give rise to connotative meanings that seem to extend beyond those intended by loveLife. The girl has an icon of the playgirl bunny on her T-shirt, thus suggesting that she is a passive sexual being for the display and pleasure of men. On his T-shirt the boy has a record with the words written – *Weird Willy Proudly Presents – In the mood for love*. In slang the word *willy* relates to the male penis and used in conjunction with the word *love* suggests that the young man is in the mood for sex. Rather than challenging conventional gender stereotypes and power dynamics, this picture reinforces the stereotype. The male is in the mood for sex and the young female is seen as for his gratification. The main payoff line of the publication is “Positive Lifestyle” but what is not apparent is whether the positive lifestyle relates to the image’s denotative meaning or its connotative meaning.

*ThetaNathi*, Issue 17 has as its title *Like a Virgin: Holding the Keys to your future*. A young woman is portrayed wearing a chastity belt with a chain and lock locked around her torso; her one hand is stretched out, suggesting to the reader to stay away, and in the other she holds a key. The image denotatively is intended to signify an empowered young women, reflected through the holding out of the hand as if to suggest “no”. The notion of empowerment is represented through her holding the key and therefore able to release herself and the payoff line – *Holding the key to your future*. The theme relates to delay or abstinence reflected through the chastity belt around her torso, which assumes that the target audience knows what a chastity belt is and the expression *Like a Virgin*, which draws upon the 1980s pop hit by Madonna.

**Figure 8: ThetaNathi. Like a virgin: Holding the key to your future. Issue 17. August**

Figure 8: ThetaNathi. Like a virgin: Holding the key to your future. Issue 17. August. The image shows a young woman wearing a chastity belt with a chain and lock around her torso. She has one hand stretched out, suggesting to the reader to stay away, and in the other she holds a key. The image denotatively is intended to signify an empowered young women, reflected through the holding out of the hand as if to suggest “no”. The notion of empowerment is represented through her holding the key and therefore able to release herself and the payoff line – *Holding the key to your future*. The theme relates to delay or abstinence reflected through the chastity belt around her torso, which assumes that the target audience knows what a chastity belt is and the expression *Like a Virgin*, which draws upon the 1980s pop hit by Madonna.



Connotatively the image signifies that of a dominatrix or bondage illustrated through the leather outfit, the lattice top, the leather belt with the lock and chain around her waist. The connotative meaning of the chastity belt plays against the denotative meaning implying that abstinence is a form of bondage from which the subject needs to be released. The inner pictures contradict the notion of an empowered subject, suggesting that the subject is teasing or challenging the reader to take the key and unlock the belt. This is reinforced through the design elements on the page that comprise what appears to be two arrows, both pointing towards the lock, that suggests

that the young woman wants someone to unlock the lock and release her from the bondage of the chastity belt. This meaning is reinforced through the use of the titles and their relation to the page design – “To be or not to be” denotatively refers to whether one should engage in sex or not and appears below the image of the girl holding the key. However, connotatively this suggests that the subject is questioning whether to remain a virgin or not. “Testing Testing” and “Saving Grace” appear with a design element that reflects an arrow pointing towards the lock. This suggests that the lock is being tested and by unlocking the lock Grace will be saved.

The back page of this edition of *ThetaNathi* illustrates a young female surrounded by boys. It appears that she is giving them oral sex, evidenced through the one boy zipping up his pants with a grin of satisfaction on his face. The caption of the picture – the more the deadlier – signifies the denotative meaning of the picture as referring to casual sex – which carries with it a high risk of HIV infection if it is unsafe.

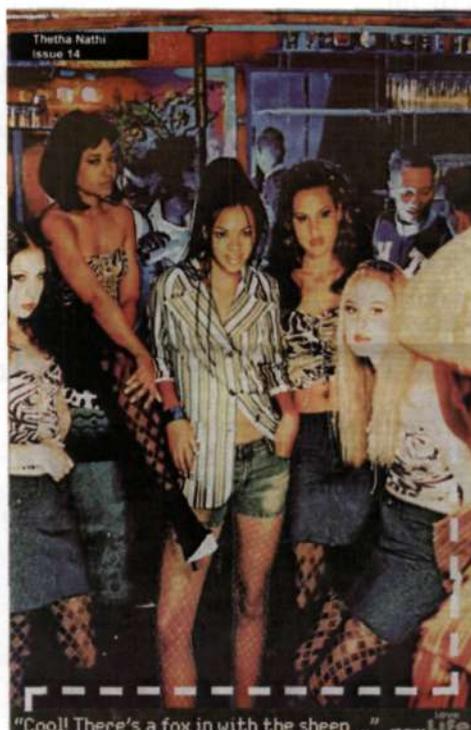
**Figure 9. ThetaNathi. The more ... the deadlier. Issue 17. August**



The connotative meaning of the image though is that in this instance risk of HIV infection is more related to that of the young woman as the young woman is the one who is engaging in oral sex with more than one partner. This positions the female as the vector of HIV. The gender dimensions suggest women being passive sexual beings for the gratification of younger men, and it is demonstrated by the fact that the

young girl is seated while the boys are standing, thus suggesting a position of power. The young female is passively almost mechanically engaged and it may suggest that she is a sex worker, illustrated by the boys lining up and waiting for their turn. In contrast the moment is portrayed as a social and pleasurable event for the young males. This image contrasts strongly with the image contained on the front cover that relates to abstinence.

**Figure 10: ThetaNathi. Issue 14. “Cool! There’s a fox in with the sheep ...”**



The notion that young women are at the disposal of the sexual pleasures of young men is reinforced in the picture above. The word *sheep* implies that the girls are meek and at the disposal of the man who appears to be entering from the side, who is referred to as a fox that symbolizes cunningness, strength and power.

The representation of gender by loveLife reinforces rather than challenges the dominant gender stereotypes. Young women are represented as sexual objects for the gratification of men. Sex is positioned as something that is pleasurable for men. The representation of young women as the sexual objects of young males is further reinforced through the imagery that loveLife uses within its representation. The representation of gender, namely the sexual roles and relationships between males and females in loveLife’s communications programme, reinforces rather than challenges

the traditional representations for gender, which should be the key to any communications programme on HIV:

*A key element in discussing the goals and objectives of communications in HIV/AIDS programs is to increase gender equity by strongly discouraging negative gender stereotypes within the target context, such as images of violent and irresponsible male sexuality or the stereotypically seductive woman who has the power to lure “innocent” men. The very foundation of HIV/AIDS prevention is based on promoting responsible and respectful sexual behaviour for both men and women (UNAIDS 1999: p. 40).*

### **Representations of youth affected by HIV**

loveLife’s depiction of child-headed households in *ThetaNathi*, Issue 32, may reinforce stigma and discrimination towards children who have been orphaned by AIDS. This picture shows a child-headed household where a young man is dressed in a suit with a round top hat, surrounded by what appear to be three siblings.

**Figure 11: ThetaNathi. Taking Charge: Great weight on small shoulders. Issue 32**



In three of the focus groups undertaken for this study where commercial brands were discussed, young people dressed in suits and wearing a top hat were described as

signifying membership of a particular social grouping related to gangsterism, drugs and criminality:

*Male participant: Maybe he will wear a Dickies suit, hat, T-shirt and trousers and tekkies.*

*Facilitator: What sort of cap will he wear like a baseball cap with a peak?*

*Male participant: No it's just a round hat*

*Male participant: No it's like when they are wearing like Dickies all this stuff, they call it a suit ...*

*Male participant: And it's like representing the tsotsi stuff because some of them smoke you know.*

*Male participant: Drugs*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group 3b October 2005)*

*Male participant: And these brands [are] most popularly used by gangsters and criminals, like tekkies (running shoes) of All Stars, when you wear All Stars ... they can conclude that you are a gangster.*

*Male Participant: But that depends on what you are wearing with, what your combination – they can wear the All Stars down there and wear ... sometimes you see these guys wearing the All Stars and a suit. He comes that I am a gangster ...*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group 2 October 2005)*

## **Summary**

Brands compete to appeal to as large an audience as possible through the social identities that they construct and that invite the audience to take up that which is reflected within the representation of the brand. These identities are created over time through the discourses upon which the brand draws, that allows the audience to form a mental picture of that which the brand represents, which constitutes its distinctive brand discourse that gives rise to the brand identity myth. The identity myth of the brand symbolically defines the boundaries of who is included and who is excluded.

In its representation the dominant identity myth of loveLife leans more towards the connotative meaning of the brand name – namely that of sex and relationships.

The use of English as its dominant language and its representation of the rainbow youth where language, culture, race and socio-economic differences are brushed over position the brand as one that is predominantly urban and middle class. The middle class consumerism of the brand is reflected through the representation of young people in the latest fashion brands and youth accessories and where consumption of these will act as an antidote to HIV infection.

The relevance of the graphics used by loveLife in relation to its target audience needs to be questioned. As Parker (2005) points out, the 12 – 17 age group contains adolescents at different stages of their sexuality, those that may be sexually active and those that are yet to initiate sex. The representation of adolescent sexuality as something that is cool and something in which everyone is engaged may unintentionally increase peer pressure on young people to engage in sex rather than challenging young people to abstain or be faithful to their sexual partners. Rather than challenging conventional stereotypes relating to adolescent sexuality and gender, loveLife reinforces these, positioning young women as sexual objects for the gratification of younger men. Young men are sexually in charge and young women are portrayed as passive objects of their desires. While loveLife claims to be a brand for all young people discourses of *Born Free* and the *AIDS Free Generation*, symbolically it places the loveLife brand in the realm of those that are negative, excluding those that are positive.

loveLife positions HIV as something that is an individual decision rather than an outcome of the complex social environment within which young people live in South Africa, which shapes and informs their sexual behaviour. These include the contextual factors relating to the political (which extends beyond government to include traditional and community political contexts), socio-economic (poverty), gender (the power relations between men and women) and the spiritual environments that impact upon where and how sex takes place.

While loveLife has as its stated objective to bring about national discussion on youth and adolescent sex and HIV prevention, its representation fails to encourage this discussion and rather portrays parents and youth in oppositional relationships

where parents are seen as withholding from their children the secrets of sex that loveLife will reveal.

The dominant representation of adolescent sexuality by loveLife and the positioning of loveLife in relation to other stakeholders may impact negatively on loveLife as stakeholders such as people living with HIV, parents and religious groups who may attempt to regulate access to loveLife publications or limit the participation of their youth in loveLife programmes if they feel that the identity being offered to their young people does not correspond with their norms and values.

Whether or not broader audiences read the semiotic meanings as do I in this chapter is a matter for further reception research. Why they were constructed in this open-ended way by loveLife remains an open question. loveLife has seldom responded in public fora to these kinds of semiotically-based critiques, even though they are available widely on websites and elsewhere (CADRE, CCMS; Delate 2002; Jordaan 2006).

## Chapter 5: Producing loveLife

The moment of representation examined how loveLife drew upon different discourses to encode the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand with meaning that over time enable consumers to identify, talk about and make sense of it in everyday life.

This chapter examines the moment of production within the “Circuit of Culture” and explores the manner in which the loveLife “lifestyle” brand is produced by loveLife through creating “synergy” by combining software (media) that is used to circulate the meanings that it intends to convey, with hardware (HIV prevention service delivery) to generate consumption (Negus 1997).

### **The development of the loveLife lifestyle brand in South Africa**

The principle driving force behind the loveLife Programme is the Henry J. Kaizer Family Foundation (KFF). The foundation, established by the US Industrialist, Henry J. Kaiser, has as its aim to improve the health and health care of disadvantaged Americans (Sinclair 2002).

The South African Grantmaking Programme of the KFF started in 1987/8 and is overseen by a South African, Dr Michael Sinclair. The South African Programme, prior to the establishment of loveLife, aimed to develop an equitable and optimally efficient national public health system through supporting the Health Systems Trust (HST), the Reproductive Health Research Unit (RHRU), the Child Health Unit at the University of Cape Town and the Cape Town-based Media Training Programme to implement reproductive and maternal health programmes (Sinclair 2002).

The KFF also aimed to increase media coverage on health issues affecting the poor and disadvantaged communities of South Africa by co-funding eight health reporters within major news services, including the SABC and the Independent Newspaper Group for 6-7 years. In 1999, the Foundation’s media programme was consolidated into Health-e,<sup>9</sup> an electronic-based health news service (Sinclair 2002). KFF also supports the Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights that recognises the

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<sup>9</sup> In 2004, the Foundation withdrew its support for Health-e, citing that it was consolidating its funding to support loveLife.

work of people in trying to improve the health system and health care of the most disadvantaged. (Sinclair 2002).

The decision by the KFF to become more involved in HIV prevention was a result of emerging and increasing evidence that suggested that HIV in South Africa was increasing and that the HIV prevention efforts in South Africa, in the opinion of the Foundation, were in disarray:

*Such an intervention was substantially necessary ... you will remember that South Africa had been through the whole Sarafina debacle, that the national HIV prevention effort was essentially in disarray for several years and I think a lot of momentum was lost. The Beyond Awareness Campaign was up and running but there were a lot of concerns. I think that the government was putting constraints on that campaign largely as a result of concern about political conservancy and the lack of leadership in the Department of Health that were impacting on the ability of that campaign being what it could have been (Sinclair 2002).*

The KFF in 1997 commissioned Judi Nwokedi-Fortuin, a psychologist with experience in the area of youth sexuality, HIV prevention programmes, media and culture to undertake formative research to determine what intervention the KFF should undertake to address HIV.

This research comprised a two-year study consisting of a literature review of international and South African best practices in relation to HIV prevention and branding. Qualitative research, comprising twenty-six focus groups, and a quantitative postal survey were undertaken to investigate youth awareness of HIV and their internalisation of risk. This research was complemented with mathematical modeling and epidemic projections to determine the trajectory of the epidemic over time, based on available epidemiological and demographic information. Consultations were also undertaken with national organizations to get their input into what programme was required to effectively address HIV (Nwokedi-Fortuin 2002; Harrison & Steinberg 2002; Sinclair 2002; Epstein 2003).

The research findings, although never published, indicated a “high degree of brand awareness and consumption amongst young people, influenced by the global youth culture of music, fashion, pop icons and commercial brands, communicated through

the commercial media” (Harrison & Steinberg, 2002). The focus groups also suggested that young people were turned off by traditional HIV messaging and the AIDS red ribbon, which is the national symbol for the AIDS response in South Africa (Nwokedi-Fortuin 2002; Harrison and Steinberg 2002: p. 26; Sinclair 2002). Harrison and Steinberg add:

*A major influence on post-liberation South African youth is the global youth culture of music, fashion, pop-icons and commercial brands, communicated principally through commercial media. A series of 24 focus groups held across South Africa in both rural and urban areas found consistently high awareness of and loyalty to commercial brands. High intensity brand association is facilitated by a relatively sophisticated marketing milieu, and high media penetration (99% radio and 75% TV coverage). Another critical insight of the focus group series was that young people were alienated by traditional HIV messaging (such as ABC), and were turned off by the red AIDS ribbon equating that symbol with disease and death (Harrison and Steinberg 2002: p. 26).*

The formative research process culminated in a three-day workshop where the findings were presented that indicated the need for a HIV prevention intervention targeting young people, which are summed up by Sinclair as follows:

*The main thing was clearly that there seemed to be an opportunity based on the demographics of South Africa, where you have 45% under 15, that if one were able to substantially impact that infection rate, then you'd have a reasonable opportunity for turning the trajectory. The second was the cumulative evidence that such an intervention was necessary (Sinclair 2002).*

Based on the research findings it was decided to undertake a brand-driven, sustained multi-dimensional national programme targeting young people aged 12-17 focusing on: making condom usage part of youth culture; establishing youth-friendly reproductive health services, education, community outreach and institutional support (loveLife 2001).

According to CADRE (undated<sup>10</sup>), one of the weaknesses in the formative research undertaken by loveLife is the lack of a baseline study that measured HIV prevalence

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<sup>10</sup> CADRE. (2002). loveLife: A measure of success? Available at: [www.comminit.com](http://www.comminit.com).

and incidence amongst youth as well as the audiences' knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. A proper baseline study provides the basis upon which future impacts can be evaluated, thus integrating evaluation into the project (Piotrow et al 1997).

### **Producing loveLife**

loveLife, initially known as the National Adolescent Sexual Health Initiative (NASHI), was launched in September 1999 as a joint initiative by a consortium of organizations. This consortium drew upon the existing partners being funded by the Kaiser Family Foundation into one overarching programme, namely:

- Health Systems Trust, which was responsible for financial oversight and the programmatic management of the loveLife programme;
- Reproductive Health Research Unit, which is responsible for the monitoring and evaluation of loveLife and the implementation of the National Adolescent Youth Friendly Clinic Initiative (NAFCI);
- Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa (PPASA), which had a long history in addressing issues relating to adolescent sexual health including the establishment of youth centres, and which was responsible for the GroundBREAKERS, the loveLife Youth Centres and the loveLife Franchises;
- Advocacy Initiatives, headed by Nwokedi-Fortuin, who led the research that defined the establishment of loveLife, and who was responsible for the development and implementation of its media programme; and
- Media Training Centre

A National Advisory Board, which brings together prominent South Africans, was established to act as a sounding board as to what is working and what can be done better, but has no decision-making authority. The Advisory Board, initially led by the First Lady of South Africa, Ms Zanele Mbeki, is currently chaired by former ANC Secretary-General and South African Ambassador to London, Ms Cheryl Carolus. Its past and present membership includes prominent South Africans such as Supreme Court Justice Edwin Cameron; The Minister of Health for South Africa, Members of Parliament; representatives of media organizations, such as the SABC and the Independent Newspaper Group, and representatives from the private sector (Interview: Harrison, 2002; Interview: Modise 2002; Private Correspondence: Ndungane 2002).

A Technical Advisory Group (TAG), comprising international experts in the field of communication, epidemiology and public health, was established to review the loveLife strategy and programmes, assess their impact and make recommendations to enhance loveLife's effectiveness. The advisory group is led by Dr Ward Cates, President of Family Health International, and includes Dr Helene Gayle, who is also co-chair of the Global HIV Prevention Working Group convened by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Gates Foundation (Harrison 2002; Cates 2002).

The Chief Executive Officer of loveLife oversees the day-to-day management of the programme supported by a management team. While loveLife started off as a consortium, it evolved into a not-for-profit Section 21 Company still drawing upon the consortium members to manage its primary programmes (Harrison 2002).

loveLife represents an unprecedented public-private partnership and was most likely one of the largest and most well-funded youth projects globally. In the period 1999 – 2005 more than \$130 million was spent on loveLife, half of which was provided by the Kaiser Family Foundation (Singer 2005). In 2002 the South African government formed a partnership with loveLife providing R75 million towards the programme. Other funders have included the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UNICEF, the Nelson Mandela Foundation, the Anglo-American Chairman's Fund and Vodacom.

loveLife's media partners include the South African Broadcasting Corporation and the Independent Newspaper Group. Its corporate sponsors are Avis Car Rental; ClearChannel Independent, CocaCola Bottlers, Mondi Paper, Pick 'n Pay, Primedia, South African Airways, Southern Sun Hotels, Spoornet, Ster-Kinekor, Teljoy and UU Net (loveLife (b), n.d.).

loveLife received a \$68 million grant from the Global Fund for AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria of which 16.5 million was disbursed but a further \$51.5 million was not disbursed following a review by the Technical Review Panel of the Global Fund in February 2005. There are conflicting reports about why the fund decided to stop funding loveLife. According to loveLife the primary reason was ideological and was voiced by conservative members of the Global Fund Board that oppose loveLife's approach, or board members who used their votes to voice dissatisfaction with South Africa's response to AIDS. The board on its part pointed out that "there was little evidence of delivery of services of programmatic importance

for HIV and AIDS". In particular concern was raised around the promotion of non-barrier contraceptives (Makgetla 2006). Further criticism pointed towards the financial management and the inability of loveLife to account for funds on a donor-by-donor basis, while loveLife on its part pointed out that the strengthening of the rand and late disbursements by the Global Fund delayed its ability to deliver. In 2004 already President Thabo Mbeki had raised concerns regarding the accountability of funds by loveLife in his weekly slot on *ANC Today*. This letter ironically followed criticisms by the Executive Director of the Global Fund, Richard Feacham, of the government for its late disbursement of funds to loveLife.

*A complicating factor in this regard is that loveLife also receives funding directly from our government. However, the report submitted by loveLife did not indicate clearly which activities had been funded by the Global Fund and which by our government (Mbeki 2004).*

The suspension of funding by the Global Fund resulted in loveLife having to scale back its programmes, including reducing its staff complement, number of regions, GroundBREAKERS and its media budget (*Business Day* 2006).

#### **loveLife as cultural producer - relationships with the cultural intermediaries**

loveLife is a cultural producer that draws upon the cultural intermediaries of advertising, journalism and public relations to give meaning to that which it wishes to convey. As a cultural producer the approach, aims and objectives of the loveLife programme are defined in a number of documents.

According to Harrison and Steinberg (2002) the initial aims of the loveLife programme were defined as reducing the incidence (number of new infections) amongst 15-20 year olds by at least 50% over five years and focusing on reducing the negative consequences of premature and adolescent sex by promoting sexual health and healthy lifestyles for young people. The principles that guide loveLife include:

- Targets young people aged 12-17;
- Exploits popular culture;
- Promotes a "positive lifestyle";
- Urges a national discussion around sex and sexuality;
- Taps into optimism and aspirations of young people in the future;

- Departs and sets itself apart from conventional HIV prevention efforts; and
- Competes with major commercial brands for the attention or mental space of young people.

According to the loveLife Communications Strategy (2002<sup>11</sup>) the basic premise of the loveLife strategy is that open communication around sex and sexuality is a precondition for behavioural change, in particular in relation to adolescent sex, sexuality, and gender relations. To bring about these changes requires an internalisation of the desired changes amongst youth and those that influence young people such as parents and peers. Altman (2002<sup>12</sup>) says that loveLife draws upon the aspirational optimism of young people, motivating them to accept sexual responsibility as an essential part of their lifestyle if they want to achieve their goals.

According to David Harrison (2001) the lifestyle proposition to which loveLife is working is defined as one that is “hip and cool”. It motivates young people to pursue their future aspirations responsibly.

*What we are trying to do is to create a brand that is so strong that hey young people who want to be hip and cool the rest of it associate with it? Cause for us that's the first step, unless you have got that level of identification, unless you have got that level of association that is positive, that is hip, that is cool, you are not going to be able to start conveying messages to young people (David Harrison 2001).*

*loveLife style is about hip, happening, highly motivated youth actively pursuing future aspirations and acting responsibly at the vanguard of an AIDS free era in South Africa ([www.loveLife.org](http://www.loveLife.org)).*

Its branding approach is modeled along that of the soft drink Sprite that embedded itself within youth culture through exploiting the “cool factor” by sponsoring hip hop concerts, planting attractive kids in Internet chat rooms or college dormitories and paying them to influence their peers (Epstein 2003).

The loveLife Communication Strategy articulates the themes to be followed by its communications programme, comprising print, radio and television. This guides and ensures consistency of its messages across the various media that it employs to

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11 loveLife. 2002. Communications Strategy 2002. Informing loveLife's Multi-Media Campaign

12 Altman, D.E. 2002. An Update on loveLife. South Africa's National HIV Prevention Program for Youth: Showing the way for Global HIV Prevention.

circulate its messages. The key themes identified in the communications strategy are unpacked, using creative designs based upon the following key principles:

- Stand apart from the media clutter and attract attention.
- Convey its educational message in an entertaining manner.
- Provoke and elicit a discussion.
- Bring about "talk" as *talk about it* is the entrée to loveLife messages

(Stadler & Hlongwa 2002; loveLife 2002; Harrison & Nwokedi-Fortuin 2001).

According to loveLife (Undated.b.13) its messages are intended to focus on the risk factors or the behaviours that place young people at the risk of HIV infection and drivers which refer to the contextual gender and socio-economic factors that are fuelling HIV in South Africa, namely: teenage pregnancy and STIs which are ascribed to sexual coercion and abuse, transactional sex, the impact of poverty and pessimism, poor parental communication and the obstacles to accessing health care in public clinics. The messages aim to shift behaviour in a non-didactic manner towards delaying the initiation of sexual activity, reducing the number of sexual partners amongst the sexually active and increasing condom usage.

According to Harrison (Interview: 2002) the creative execution of the loveLife messages is coordinated by the Head of Communications who is responsible for ensuring consistency in messaging across all media formats. Different directors are responsible for the oversight of the production of the loveLife media programme:

- An editorial team is responsible for the development of the newspaper inserts.
- The Director of Radio is responsible for its radio programming.
- The Director of Television is responsible for its television programming.

It not clear whether loveLife draws upon the cultural intermediaries of advertising agencies to assist in the development of its mass media campaign or whether the campaign is developed internally. Advertising agencies mentioned in relation to loveLife include RedNail and the AAA School of Advertising, which uses creative competitions amongst its students to derive creative designs for loveLife (Interview: Nwokedi-Fortuin 2002).

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13 loveLife. Undated. loveLife: South Africa's National HIV Prevention Campaign for Young People. Parklands. South Africa

## **Synergy: Providing the Software (Media) and Hardware (Services) for HIV Prevention**

loveLife combines the software of the mass media to convey messages on HIV prevention with the hardware of adolescent HIV prevention services with the aim of encouraging behavioural change:

*Yes its behavioural change is changing sexual behaviour. So the question then becomes how do you change sexual behaviour for young people and our model is pretty simple. That on the one hand you need a massive communication drive and on the other hand you need a level of engagement with the messages that is profound and sustained. I always use the analogy – you got to both see the Coke on the advert and you have got to taste the coke. So those are the two side of loveLife. One is putting out the message to young people, the other is helping them to grapple, internalize what it is we are trying to do and so the two sides of loveLife are the high powered multimedia on the one hand but on the other hand the service development, institutional support and outreach (Interview: Harrison 2001).*

Sinclair (2002) describes loveLife’s communications approach as a “trickle down strategy”, with the mobile media intended to profile and maintain brand engagement and a linkage to the services through its ThetaJunction toll-free number. The themes of its communications strategy are unpacked through its radio and television programmes, its print publications and as part of its interpersonal communications activities, thereby achieving synergy not only in its messaging not only between its media products, but also with its programmatic component.

### **The Software for HIV Prevention - Using the Mass Media to Circulate the Message**

#### *Outdoor Media*

According to Nwokedi-Fortuin (2001) loveLife’s rationale for investing in the outdoor media was “for loveLife to be where the people are”. The outdoor media are used by loveLife to:

- Spark a national conversation, dialogue or debate on sex.
- Profile and maintain an engagement among the audience, its brand and helpline number.

- Focus on the basic risk-taking behaviour driving the epidemic.

The principles governing the lovelife outdoor media include:

- Stand out above the media clutter.
- Be contemporary in look and feel.
- Appeal to the aspirations of young people.
- Be frank and straightforward.
- Be sophisticated with messages appearing risque in appearance but also conservative.

(Interview: Nwokedi-Fortuin 2001)

#### *Print Media*

Between 2005 and 2006 loveLife developed three print media supplements, *S'camto Print*, *ThetaNathi* and *S'camto Uncut*, distributed within existing national newspapers, its Y-centres, youth clinics, the loveTrain and loveTours, franchises and thetaJunction callers on request. *ThetaNathi* and *S'camto Print* are also distributed as a supplement in the following publications that form part of the Independent Newspaper Group:

- The Cape Argus (Cape Town)
- The Star (Johannesburg)
- The Pretoria News (Pretoria)
- Diamond Fields Advertiser (Kimberley)
- Daily News (Durban)
- Rapport (Only in Cape Town)

The supplements address issues according to the themes defined in the loveLife communications strategy. An editorial team is responsible for overseeing the development of each edition (Interview: Harrison and Dunn 2002).

#### *Radio*

loveLife produces and broadcasts radio programmes in all eleven official South African languages through the SABC's local language stations and its commercial station METRO-FM. In addition to these broadcasts it produces radio advertisements.

Its programming takes the form of talk shows with youth panellists and its unique magazine style, offering alternative lifestyles, celebrity interviews and news focusing on issues relating to adolescent sexual and reproductive health and motivation. Radio studios have been established within its Y-centres and on the loveLife train and participants from its youth centres are trained as DJs and in managing the radio studio (*ThetaNathi*, March 31 - April 04; loveLife 2004).

**Figure 12: loveLife radio programmes and listnership figures**

Name of Station	Name of Programme	Station Audience Past seven days, July 2006 (000)
Ikwewezi FM	Siyaphophota	1 509
Motsweding FM	Reabua	2 926
Umhlobo Wenene	Masiolaneni Indlebe Nabatsha	4 623
Ukhozi FM		6 321
Thobela FM	A Re Bolelle Le loveLife	3 001
Mughanna Lonene FM	Vantshwa Va Hleva	1 374
PhalaPhala	Ri Khou Amba	847
Lesedi FM	Livila La Basha	3 777
Thandimpilo	Ukozi FM	
Metro FM	Styling Life	5 228

Source: SAARF. Station Audience past 7 days. [www.saarf.co.za](http://www.saarf.co.za).

### *Television*

The first television programme produced by loveLife was called *JikaJika* (To go around), which was broadcast on e-TV. A programme targeting the young people below the aged of 12 called *Codi Loud and Clear* was also produced (Stadler 2001; Stadler & Hlongwa 2004). loveLife also broadcasts highlights from the loveLife Games (see below) on television.

loveLife's main television programme is a motivational reality-based programme called *S'camto groundBREAKERS*. This programme departs from conventional HIV programmes that use soap operas to model behaviour and draws upon popular reality-based television formats such as *Survivor* and the *Amazing Race*. The message of the television series is that by leading a positive lifestyle and setting goals HIV is not a problem (*ThetaNathi*, Issue , May 6 - 10, 2002; *ThetaNathi*, Issue 30, *ThetaNathi*, Issue 19, September 02 - 06; *ThetaNathi*, Issue 30, March 03 - 07; *ThetaNathi*, Issue 31, March 27 - 21; [www.scamtogb.com](http://www.scamtogb.com)).

An entry on the loveLife website questions the benefit of sending groundBREAKERS on "holidays", and whether the investment justifies the output. The response from loveLife was that the programme is aimed at reinforcing a positive lifestyle, informed choice, shared responsibility, motivating young people to believe in themselves and in their future ([www.loveLife.org](http://www.loveLife.org)).

The costs of its reality-based television programme, and in particular sending young people on yachts in the Cape to Rio Race and to Antarctica is exorbitant and beyond the reach of many organisations. In countries like South Africa where there are a number of corporates who are investing in HIV-related programmes, cost-sharing or, as in the case of SAA, providing in-kind support, enables the development of such programmes.

#### *Small Media*

Small media comprises the leaflets, brochures, booklets, books, exhibitions, flip charts, stickers, posters, signs and murals that are produced as part of HIV awareness campaigns (Parker 2005). loveLife has produced a number of leaflets and booklets that are primarily intended to provide their audience with additional information on adolescent reproductive health and sex.

#### *Public and media relations*

Parker (2005) documents how loveLife uses public relations to position itself in relation to other HIV interventions in an attempt to establish for itself a position of hegemony.

In its public relations exercises, loveLife has drawn upon the cultural intermediaries of public relations agencies. Thomas Molete Communications (Pty) Ltd has provided support for loveLife's public relations activities in South Africa. The New York-

based Corkery Group has provided public relations support to loveLife at international AIDS conferences such as Durban (2000) and Barcelona (2002).

The Kaiser Family Foundation also provides support to the international public relations activities of the loveLife Programme through sponsoring trips to South Africa by prominent US-based journalists and editors, often at the exclusion of other HIV prevention efforts and with no reference to criticism of the loveLife programme.

loveLife has made use of international platforms such as the international AIDS conference's and other fora including town hall meetings on World AIDS Day in New York with prominent figures such as UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to promote loveLife's approach to HIV prevention and adolescent reproductive health. At all these fora, loveLife is promoted in the absence of critique or reference to other HIV prevention interventions being undertaken in South Africa (Parker 2005).

According to Parker (2005) the Kaiser Family Foundation utilizes awards and arranges visits by prominent figures in the international AIDS community to obtain endorsements of the loveLife programme. These include amongst others the UN Special Envoy on AIDS in Africa, the UNAIDS Executive Director, the Executive Director of the Global Fund, the UN Secretary-General, Pop Star Bono and former presidents Nelson Mandela, Bill Clinton and Jimmy Carter.

According to Parker (2005) these endorsements are used in loveLife's public relations activities to position the programme, often at the exclusion of other interventions occurring in the country, and to legitimise the loveLife programme, often without reference to the local criticisms of the loveLife programme within South Africa.

Parker (2005) provides an in-depth critique of the manner in which loveLife uses research, endorsements and other strategies to advance its public relations agenda.

#### *Branding youth: loveLife GroundBREAKERS/mphintshi's*

The loveLife *groundBREAKERS* are youth aged 18 to 25 who undergo a series of training sessions to equip them with sexual health counselling skills and techniques for effective outreach to other young people. *groundBREAKERS* are required to be proficient in English and familiar with the loveLife concept and get paid a monthly stipend (Harrison and Steinberg 2002).

The *GroundBREAKERS* wear uniforms that display the loveLife brand name and slogan, thereby making them readily identifiable to young people in the communities in which they work and symbolically constructing them as the embodiment of the loveLife lifestyle. The *GroundBREAKERS* support the management of the loveLife services in the day-to-day running of the educational, entertainment and recreational programmes in the Y-centres. They undertake community outreach to surrounding schools to encourage students to participate in the loveLife activities and engages with parents in the youth-friendly clinics operated by loveLife (Harrison & Steingberg, 2002).

The GroundBREAKERS are supported by *Mpintshi's* colloquial for “friends of”, therefore making them friends of loveLife, who do so voluntarily (Altman 2002; loveLife 2004).

### **Providing the Hardware for HIV Prevention - loveLife Services**

The loveLife media programme is complemented by its HIV prevention services consisting of *Y-centres*, the *youth clinics*, the *loveLife Train* and the *loveLife franchises*. The programmes and services may be described as the hardware for HIV prevention, providing youth-friendly sexual health and educational services combined with entertainment.

#### *The loveLife Y-centres*

Naidoo (2003) describes the loveLife *Y-centres* as multipurpose, educational and recreational youth-friendly health venues for young people. Health services include contraception, pregnancy testing, treatment for STIs, voluntary counselling and testing for HIV. Educational programmes using interpersonal communication, include: a motivational programme, peer education and information on nutrition, information, sports and recreation. Recreational activities include basketball; ballroom, gumboot and township dancing; karate and aerobics; drama, art and design.

Kelly, Parker and Oyosi (2002) argue that the loveLife Y-centre model is capital, resource and personnel intensive and not a model that is workable for the provision of sexual and reproductive health services for the country as a whole.

#### *loveLife Adolescent Youth Friendly Clinic Initiative (NAFCI)*

There are over 300 *NAFCI* clinics being undertaken in partnership with the Department of Health. The youth-friendly clinics are accredited based upon national standards set for adolescent-friendly services in primary health care clinics. The clinics are similar to the *Y-centres*. The only difference is that they are incorporated within existing government health centres and provide a focal point for loveLife's community mobilisation efforts involving schools and community organisations. Being placed within existing health centres enables young people to be referred to service providers trained in providing adolescent reproductive health. This includes referrals for treatment of STIs, testing for HIV, pregnancy testing and other health-related matters (Altman 2002).

An evaluation undertaken of the loveLife *NAFCI* Clinics found that while the clinics had good clinical practice they were less prepared to deal with the clinical needs of adolescents. Reasons cited for this included that staff were unaware of the sexual and reproductive health needs and rights of adolescents; were not trained or had any plans to be trained to provide client-centred services for adolescents, and that adolescents did not participate in the provision of education and information in the clinics and community. However, when compared to non-*NAFCI* clinics the study found that the *NAFCI* clinics did perform better in meeting the needs of adolescents as well as in being recognised as focal points for promoting healthy lifestyles for adolescents (loveLife 2004).

Kelly, Parker and Oyosi (2002) point out that the *NAFCI* Clinics hold more promise as an intervention than the *Y-centre* as it seeks to develop the public health sector adolescent reproductive health environment and strengthens the capacity of health care providers to provide youth-friendly services. They note though that this may take several years to move to scale and that in most instances the services simply may not be available.

### *loveLife Franchises*

loveLife (2001) describes the creation of the *franchises* as social franchising rather than commercial franchising. Organisations apply to become loveLife *franchises* and if accepted have to adopt the loveLife strategies, image and approaches that loveLife uses to achieve its mission. This symbolically frames these organizations under the banner of loveLife and results in them giving up their own community identity.

Organisations are accredited as *franchises* once a feasibility assessment has been undertaken to determine whether they match the loveLife criteria.

#### *LoveLife Train and loveTours*

The *loveLife Train*, undertaken in partnership with Spoornet, comprises a fully equipped kitchen, two coaches for educational sessions and a sound studio that broadcasts from within the train. *GroundBREAKERS* manage activities that take place at the *loveTrain*, which include mobilizing schools in the area to send their students to participate in the activities at the *loveTrain* on a given day, as well as sex education, arts and culture and sports activities (Harrison & Steinberg 2002).

The *loveTours* consists of two mobile units that visit the rural areas of the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal (Harrison & Steinberg 2002).

#### *The loveLife Games*

The *loveLife Games* are undertaken in partnership with the Department of Sports and Recreation, the Department of Education and the United Schools Sports Association of South Africa (USSASA) The *loveLife Games* comprise a year-long calendar of sports events run at district, regional and provincial level that culminate in a national mini-olympics. The games are operated like a "mini olympics" that includes motivational sessions, lifeskills and sexuality education (Government of South Africa, handout).

### **Using Research to Link Production to Consumption**

loveLife uses research to inform its programme design. Surveys have been undertaken to examine how young people feel about their lives, futures, HIV and sexual behaviour and exposure to loveLife (loveLife 2001; loveLife 2004). The lack of baseline data, inadequate explanations of the research methodology and the increasingly complex HIV environment makes it difficult to measure the extent to which loveLife is impacting on HIV. The use of quantitative research methodologies fail to explain the meanings that young people and other audiences attribute to loveLife (Parker 2005). Having heard of loveLife is a different interpretation from asking what loveLife means. Its research methodology uses aided recall that shows people the logo and then asks if they had seen or heard of loveLife. This may be leading the respondent rather than gauging top-of-mind interaction with loveLife.

A variety of mechanisms are used to link the production of its newspaper supplements to consumption. This includes drawing upon Y-centre members to gauge their responses and to inform the planning of future issues. Using Y-centre participants as models and providing vox-pops that are included in the magazine (S'camto Print Editorial Goals 2002). Competitions and give-aways are used by loveLife to gauge the wider audience's response to its publications and messages.

## **Summary**

loveLife is a cultural industry that defines its lifestyle according to a given strategy and employs the services of the cultural intermediaries to give creative expression to the meanings it wants to convey through encoding the enduring and non-enduring brand signs with meaning. loveLife makes use of the cultural distributors comprising the mass media to circulate its messages but also provides physical spaces through which its meanings can be conveyed through interpersonal communication.

To link production to consumption loveLife undertook formative research that defined the target audience, approach and key principles of the programme. A key oversight was the lack of the establishment of baseline data that would have enabled the programme to monitor its impact over time. It uses feedback mechanisms such as competitions and monitoring and evaluations of its programmes to gauge the extent to which it is reaching its goals and objectives. However, it is not evident how this research and independent studies conducted on loveLife are used to inform the programme design so that it better responds to the needs of its target population.

loveLife is an attempt to establish what Negus (1997) calls media synergy by combining cultural software (branding and media) with HIV prevention hardware (services). The meanings of loveLife are produced by the makers of the brand, in this case loveLife. The enduring signs of the brand are prominently displayed and promoted across a range of media, entertainment products and leisure goods. Yet the loveLife name, the colours that it uses and the images portrayed through its media products stands for and represents meanings that loveLife wishes to communicate – that are produced. The prominent display of the enduring signs of the brand at its youth services and programmes symbolically constructs these places as texts that sustains meanings and practices that extend beyond just the name of the brand, but

represents a distinctive discourse of positive lifestyle and positive sexuality – the *loveLife discourse*.

Michael Sinclair (2002) points out that while loveLife may have created the brand and all the associations that it places on it using its research, that does not necessarily mean that that is how everyone else interprets the brand.

To explore the meanings that young people give to the loveLife brand it is necessary to examine how young people decode and consume the meanings of the loveLife brand through the manner in which they appropriate the brand within their everyday lives to signify meaning about themselves to others. It is not only young people that consume the loveLife brand – adults also consume the meanings of the brand and may try to regulate these meanings, especially where they feel that such meanings may not resonate with their cultural norms and values.

## **Chapter 6 Consumption: loveLife, commercial brands and everyday life**

Consumption examines the meanings that people decode from the representation of cultural artifacts and the manner in which these meanings correlate with those intended by the producers of the cultural artifacts. The meanings of cultural artifacts are not passively decoded by consumers, rather consumers appropriate cultural artifacts within their everyday lives and encode them to signify meaning about themselves that facilitates social interaction.

This thesis aims to explore how young people make meaning of the loveLife brand and commercial brands. In doing so this chapter examines the meanings that young people decode of the word “brand”, their decoding of the meanings of loveLife; the different media that they consume and through which they construct meaning of the loveLife and commercial brands, and the manner in which these meanings are appropriated within everyday life to signify meanings about themselves and their identities. This chapter, owing to ethical constraints, does not attempt to determine whether the appropriation of the meanings of loveLife has had any impact on the sexual behaviours of young people aged 12 – 17. This should be the subject of further research.

### **Youth Decodings of the Word ‘Brand’**

Using unaided recall there was no spontaneous recall of loveLife as a youth brand. The word “brand” was decoded in all groups as a sign for fashion brands with LaCoste, Nike and the local brand Loxion Kultcha being recalled as the most popular brands. Fashion brands are regarded as “brands”, as these are items that young people purchase and use in their everyday lives.

*Facilitator: If I was to ask you what do you think are the most popular brands that young people use?*

*Female participant: As in clothing?*

*Facilitator: What do you think brands are?*

*Female participant: Clothing, I straight away think of clothing*

*Male Participant: Clothing*

*Male participant: Ja, clothing*

*Facilitator: Why do you think clothing?*

*Male participant: It's the most popular*

*Female: You don't really think of other stuff as brands, we don't really buy appliances and stuff.*

*(Gauteng Group 2, March 2006)*

### **Youth Decodings of the Enduring and Non-enduring Signs**

According to loveLife and the RHRU (2004: p. 63) 85% of young people after being asked and simultaneously shown the loveLife logo report having heard of or seen loveLife. The three main media through which young people are mostly exposed to loveLife are television (48%), the outdoor media (22%) and radio (17%). Five percent and less of young people report having heard or seen of loveLife through the loveLife Games (2%), the health services (4%), youth centres and *groundBREAKERS* (5%).

In this study all groups recalled having heard or seen of loveLife when specifically asked. The decodings of the meanings of loveLife varied in relation to the media through which participants were exposed to loveLife.

**Figure 13: Exposure to loveLife, Payoff lines recalled and decodings by Focus Group**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Exposure to loveLife by Group</b>	<b>Payoff lines recalled</b>	<b>Decoding of loveLife</b>
KwaZulu-Natal Group 1. Mixed Group, Rural	Radio, Television, S'camto Print, and ThetaNathi, loveLife Clinic, S'camto GroundBREAKERS at school, debating	Delay, reduce, protect  Talk about it	Know about your future.  Think what is coming into your future.  Take care of yourself  Teaches me about everything  Something about life to protect your life

			How to play games, to keep us busy in order for us to be away from the bad things.
<b>KwaZulu-Natal Group 2. Mixed Gender Group, Rural</b>	<p>loveLife accredited school – school branded in the loveLife colours and displays loveLife billboard at entrance.</p> <p>Participated in loveLife Games and girls members of netball teams and some in the debating society.</p> <p>S'camto print</p> <p>Participants were peer educators</p> <p>School had participated in the loveLife Games, debating and ?</p>	<p>talk about it</p> <p>2010 love to be there</p> <p>Get Attitude</p>	<p>How to protect yourself from HIV/AIDS, STDs and pregnancy.</p> <p>Talks about everything.</p> <p>Open</p> <p>Maintain strong and solid relationship</p> <p>Talk about issues like love relationship and sexual relationship</p> <p>Respect each other</p> <p>Teach parents how to behave at home, how to treat children</p>
<b>KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3a, Girls Only Group, Rural</b>	<p>Radio, Television, Word of mouth, youth that had participated in the loveLife Games</p>	<p>Love to be there 2010</p>	<p>Love their lives and not fall pregnant.</p> <p>Stay away from drugs and things that are done by the youth so that I can live longer.</p> <p>Stay away from sex and do not have sex at an early age.</p> <p>Abstain from sex</p> <p>Love myself for who I am</p>

KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, Boys Only, Rural	Television: S'camto GroundBREAKERS, loveLife Games, Radio	Get Attitude	Motivating us  Live your life to the fullest  Be proud of what you are and who your are  Respecting yourself and others  loveLife is where you love a person, you do not lust a person  Gives me the information that I need
Gauteng Group 1. Mixed gender Group. Peri-Urban	Books, Pamflets, Y-centre, S'camto Print, S'camto GroundBREAKERS	No slogan recall	Caring  Speak the truth  Use a condom  Stop drinking
Gauteng, Group 2. Mixed gender Group. Urban.	Outdoor media, ThetaNathi (recall of images but not recall of publications).	Be there 2010	Sex  Chick giving guys blowjobs

The meanings of loveLife were learnt by participants to the groups from the rural areas of KwaZulu-Natal and the peri-urban area of Gauteng primarily through the interpersonal programmes of loveLife (e.g. *groundBREAKERS*, *youth clinics*, *Y-centres* and participation in the *loveLife Games*) and local language radio programmes. KwaZulu-Natal Group 3a and 3b were primarily exposed to loveLife through its radio and television programme, and word of mouth from other youth that had participated in the loveLife Games.

These groups decoded the meaning of the word loveLife as a signifier for an array of sexual and reproductive health meanings, HIV prevention (notably abstinence and faithfulness), and in relation to motivation, sports and playing games.

*Male Participant: loveLife lets the youth be aware about themselves and able to protect themselves in different kinds of situations and make young people aware about the dangerous things and to drag their legs away from the bad things and think about the future” (KZN Group 1)*

*Female Participant: I think it is something that comes to youth to know about your future, and to know about the principles and something about life to protect your life (KZN Group 1)*

*Male Participant: The first thing that comes to my mind is that you have to live your life to the fullest and be proud of what you are and who you are because there is only one life in this world that you are living (KZN Group 3b).*

*Male Participant: I would say it's a project that's telling young people everything how to deal with their bodies, something like that. How to take care of them, how to stay away from sex and how to protect themselves (Gauteng Group 1a).*

Participants from KwaZulu-Natal Group 2, which was the group that had the highest participation in the loveLife interpersonal programme, decoded the meaning of the loveLife brand in relation to the functional benefits of sporting activities, motivation and sexuality education.

*Male Participant: Sports activities*

*Female Participant: Sports activities*

*Male Participant: Motivation*

*Male Participant: Sexuality education*

*Female Participant: Activities*

*Female Participant: Like talking about sex, sexual harrasment  
(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2)*

One of the disadvantages of focus groups is that the group setting may inadvertently place pressure on the participants to conform to the group dynamics. In KwaZulu-Natal Group 3a one participant is captured on tape as whispering to a fellow participant that “loveLife is a piece of shit.”

*Facilitator: And where would you see loveLife?*

*Female participant: I heard it on the Radio, Ukhozi FM*

*Female participant: (Whispering) loveLife it's a piece of shit*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3a, October 2005)*

This was not picked up during the discussion itself and there was no probing to understand the basis for this comment on loveLife. Further on in this discussion when asked to describe the characteristics of a person that would wear a loveLife shirt this was decoded as a “playa”, referring to young men who engage in casual sexual relationships. This relates to the representation by loveLife of young people within its media programme.

*Facilitator: What sort of music would someone who wears a loveLife t-shirt like?*

*Female participant: Playa*

Gauteng Group 2 was primarily exposed to loveLife through its outdoor media and print media. This group had a discrepant decoding of the meanings of the loveLife brand, decoding it in relation to its connotative meaning - sex<sup>14</sup>.

*Facilitator: If I say the word loveLife what is the first thing that comes to mind?*

*Female participants: Sex*

*Female participants: Sex*

*Female participants: They are always on the taxi's*

*Male participants: Pretty much the same*

*Female participants: Not like love life like your love life, like loveLife the campaign sort*

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<sup>14</sup> This finding is consistent with previous studies (Delate 2001; Morrison 2003; Jordaan 2006).

*Male participant: Those ad things*

*Male participants: Those ads*

*(Gauteng Group 2)*

This discrepant decoding of loveLife was reinforced for one participant through the unaided recall of an image on the back page of *ThetaNathi* that represents a young girl giving oral sex to a number of boys.

*Facilitator: Can you name any particular characteristic of loveLife, is there anything in particular that you can remember about it?*

*Female participant: Chick giving guys blowjobs*

*Female participant: Great, what do you watch?*

*Female Participant: No, on the magazine when you turn over*

*(Gauteng Group 2: March 2006)*

The unmediated decoding of the representation by loveLife in its media programme for this participant has given rise to a stereotype of youth sexuality, that over time has given rise to a global sign where loveLife is decoded as a signifier for sex. The decoding of the meanings of sex and the failure to place this in relation to the need for safer sex and HIV prevention reflects the failure by loveLife in its representation to foreground messages relating to HIV prevention and safer sex.

The discrepant decoding of loveLife is not only limited to those areas in which loveLife has no programmatic presence. In KwaZulu-Natal Group 2 the group explains how some young people regard loveLife as teaching young people to misbehave.

*Male participant: Because we have different opinions, some are of the opinion that loveLife has taught them to misbehave.*

*Group: Ja*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group 2: October 2005)*

A female peer educator explains how she gets asked if she wants to have sex with a teacher when she talks to male teachers. This decoding links to the manner in which loveLife has represented young girls as sexual objects for male gratification.

*Female participant: Sometimes they say you are talking with a male teacher they say you want the male teacher to love you.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group 2: October 2005)*

The meanings of commercial brands, in contrast, were learnt and decoded from the representation of the images, stories and celebrities used within advertising campaigns that are circulated through the mass media. Commercial brand consumption is related to media consumption, which is determined by geographic location, language and socio-economic status and largely reflects the marketing strategy employed that is related to the target audience that they are trying to reach.

Groups from rural KwaZulu-Natal and the peri-urban areas are more likely to consume local language and regional English radio stations and free-to-air television stations, primarily SABC 1 and e-TV. The Internet was not mentioned by any of the rural groups as a medium that they have access to and the peri-urban group indicated very limited access to the Internet. These groups were more likely to recall the local brand Loxion Kultcha, sports fashion brands such as Nike and Adidas and fashion brands such as Lacoste, All Stars and Dickies.

Gauteng Group 2 consisted of youth from a private school. Brand exposure for this group is primarily mediated through national and international television channels (DSTV), fashion magazines and the Internet. The brands recalled by this group are upper-market youth fashion brands such as Diesel and Guess.

### **Youth decodings of Talk about it**

loveLife seeks to encourage a national discussion around issues relating to youth and youth sexuality. In decoding the meanings of loveLife there are conflicting decodings that undermine identification with the brand discourse and act to discourage “talk about it” as young people are embarrassed in talking about sex.

*Facilitator: In your school does everyone like loveLife?*

*Group: No*

*Male participant: Because we have different opinions, some are of the opinion that loveLife has taught them to misbehave. (Group: Ja). If I can say the truth, I am a facilitator, I call a spade a spade. I do not hide any word. Unfortunately in our culture you must hide some words. In Zulu there are*

*... some words by which we are embarrassed. They say they are embarrassed when you speak.*  
*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

A challenge in analyzing the focus groups was the manner in which young people use words and language to conceal meaning. Words such as “misbehave”, “important things”, “life”, “stupid moves” appear to be used as signs for sex and sexual relationships.

While the participants indicate that they are empowered as peer educators to talk about sex they too use language in a manner that conceals sex. There is therefore a contradiction between the decoding of the meanings and the actions that loveLife is trying to bring, namely the need for young people to talk about sex and sexual relationships.

*Female participant: I think that loveLife is important for us because it teaches us about things that are happening in life.*  
*(Gauteng, Group 1, March 2006)*

*Male participant: loveLife also making us aware about the stupid things, while you are thinking they used to say you must think twice before you make a stupid move and if you are a human being everybody has got his or her mistake we cant take a giant step for doing that particular thing and I will do this without even thinking about something that will be happening when the time is closer.*  
*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1, October 2005)*

A concerning finding of this study is the manner in which young people decode sex as something that is “dangerous” and “bad”. This indicates that rather than sexual behaviour being seen as a risk factor for HIV, the act of sex itself is decoded as something that is “dangerous” and “bad”. The impact of this decoding on the longer-term sexual lives of young people needs to be considered in future studies.

In settings where there are *groundBREAKERS* undertaking interpersonal communication with young people, the branding of the *groundBREAKERS* has succeeded in them being decoded in the minds of young people as a source of

information for young people on issues relating to sex and sexuality, games and entertainment. These meanings of the *groundBREAKERS* are learnt through everyday interaction with the *groundBREAKERS* in the *youth centres*, *NAFCI clinics* and at schools.

*Male participant: S'camto is the name that they always combine with the groundBREAKERS, there in loveLife people who teach you how to do the things and advising you during this situation you have to do this and this and everything.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1, October 2005)*

In this context the *groundBREAKERS* are regarded as an older sibling or a peer that will teach and provide young people with accurate information relating to their sexual and reproductive problems, while parents are regarded as less likely to discuss sex with their children.

*Male Participant: When they talk about the issues like love relationship and sexual relationship other parents like mine they do not want to talk about those things.*

*Group laughs*

*Male participant: Talk about those things they seem to be disgusted. They don't like it at all, maybe it is the culture, it has to do with culture. They take it as a disgrace if you are talking about a sexual relationship. Even if you are talking about a girlfriend. I won't tell them if I have a girlfriend because this can cause me little problems. Like if I am doing something wrong they will say ok it's because you have a girlfriend, are you mature now. They ask me all those questions and I feel shy to talk to them.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

This decoding of the *groundBreaker* displaces parents as the source for accurate information, undermining the stated objective of *loveLife* to encourage “talk about it” across society on issues relating to adolescent sex and sexuality.

This illustrates that while campaigns may seek to encourage parent-to-child discussions on sex and sexuality these discussions are often undermined through an array of cultural taboos as well as discomfort by both parents and young people in

openly addressing issues relating to sex and sexuality. Young people themselves may prefer confiding in peers rather than talking to adults about their sexual behaviour. Through branding the *groundBREAKERS* they have become the symbolic bearers of the loveLife discourse in everyday life.

### **Youth decodings of sub-brand S'camto**

In four of the five focus groups the word *S'camto* was decoded as a sign for “talk about it” and one group decoded the word as originating from Tsotsi language.

*Facilitator: What about the word S'camto*

*Group: S'camto laughs*

*Group: To talk in Tsotsi Taal*

*How did you learn that meaning of the word s'camto*

*Male participant: If someone uses the word and they use the word in a certain set up you get to know the meaning of the word even though you have not been explained what s'camto means.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

The use of words drawn from indigenous local languages for the sub-brand and product-naming system gives rise to the impression in the minds of those who do not understand these words that they are excluded from loveLife as loveLife does not speak their language as they could not decipher the codes that represent the loveLife discourse.

*Facilitator: Do you know what Theta means?*

*Female participant: Ball, maybe*

*Group: No, that's Tetra*

*Facilitator: And what about the word S'camto*

*Female participant: That sounds like scumbag to me*

*Facilitator: Have you heard of ThetaNathi*

*Female Participant: You see I don't think that loveLife is aimed at us at all, it's like a different language even.*

*Female participant: It's a different language.*

*(Gauteng Group 2, March 2006)*

The meaning of S'camto was also decoded through the television programme S'camto GroundBREAKERS.

*Male participant: Because there were these groundBREAKERS they were a bit what do you call this on TV, it was a drama variety, what was it...?*

*Male participant: It was a kind of a game*

*Male participant: It was a variety the S'camto GroundBREAKERS where there was fun and games and people playing around the game reserve, getting to know the wildlife, sky diving, all the sports that relate to the youth were played on that particular programme so it all about speaking free, say what's on your mind.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

In consuming the television programme speaking your mind was recognized as one of the objectives that loveLife is aiming to bring about. What young people are supposed to discuss is more related to nature conservation, sports and recreation. There was no correlation with themes of positive lifestyle, informed choice, shared responsibility, motivating young people to believe in themselves and in their future.

In increasingly complex media environments where young people have an array of media at their disposal the groundbreaker television programme competes for the attention of young people. Failure to grab the attention of young people will result in them tuning off from the programme.

*Female participant: Is loveLife like interesting, ja, we are busy. I don't know if I watch TV I have to choose what I am going to watch. I am not just going to watch something about a guy driving around I would rather go and watch desperate housewives.*

*(Gauteng, Group 2, March 2006)*

*S'camto Print / Uncut and ThetaNathi*

In all groups there was very limited exposure to S'camto Print/Uncut. While S'camto Print had been discontinued in 2002 this was still recalled by participants to the focus groups. In instances where the information being provided by loveLife is seen as important, frustration is expressed at the limitations in being able to access S'camto.

*Male participant: ...it was the loveLife magazine, this thing they don't like to involve it on the newspaper ... I phone them because I get the newspaper from my brother he has access to it. I phone them and I ask them can we have this paper delivered to the school because it deal a lot with youth issues and I phoned them but the editor told me that their problem is that there are few other companies that want to help them so they cant just give them to other schools because they don't have the money to public most of them but they are trying to get the Department of Education to help them maybe in the future will get access to it.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

The loveLife strategy of distributing and providing its print media publications through its clinics have had the benefit of making it available to young people that would ordinarily not be reached through the regular media distribution owing to cost and distribution constraints.

*Facilitator: Have all of you read S'camto and ThetaNathi.*

*Group: Ja*

*Facilitator: How did you get them?*

*Male participant: It's very hard to get it because nobody able to supply it to us about it. It's not easy to find.*

*Female participant: At the clinic*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1, October 2005)*

The benefit of the loveLife print media is that it is not space-dependent and young people are able to take the print media and read it when they are unable to participate in the interpersonal programmes being provided by loveLife.

*Female participant: You can say that you like to go to loveLife but you are busy at home. Let's say if you are at home you have the S'camto you take it and read it.*

*Facilitator: Do you think that S'camto is a good thing?*

*Male participant: I think S'camto gives more information about life*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1, October 2005)*

As with the television programme the print publication competes for the attention of young people and where it is regarded as not being relevant this undermines consumption.

*Male participant: Ja, I just saw it I did not read it and did not take much notice of it.*

*Facilitator: Why did you not take much notice?*

*Male participant: Just was not interested.*

### **Colour as a symbolic marker**

All groups recalled the use of black, purple and lime green by loveLife in its media campaign.

*Facilitator: Is there any colour associated with loveLife*

*Group: Black and purple*

*Male participant: If you say loveLife I think about purple colour, white colour, lime colour.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

The manner in which these colours have come to be associated with loveLife is decoded through the everyday interaction that young people have with loveLife.

*Male participant: I am saying purple because it once happened that we were playing the loveLife game, the posters were purple and the T-shirts they were wearing were purple. I cannot say that loveLife I can now relate with purple, but I am saying because when we were playing the loveLife Games the people who were in charge of those games their design and colours were purple.*

*KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

In this sense the colour purple has become a signifier of the loveLife brand when used in conjunction with the brand logo. No connotative meanings of the colour purple were recalled during the focus group discussions. However, in one instance the colour purple had become a signifier for danger.

### **Non-enduring Signs Youth Recall of the loveLife Campaigns**

The most commonly unaided recalled campaign was the “love to be there 2010” and the “Get Attitude” campaigns. Both of these campaign depicted young people that

were engaged in everyday activities such as getting an education, sports and the 2010 World Cup.

Recall appears to be dependent on the degree and extent to which people identify with the characters that are depicted within the representation of its advertisements and identification with the content of the message.

The “love to be there” campaign depicted aspirational messages of young people engaged in everyday activities, such as getting an education, and drew upon the optimism of South Africa being awarded the 2010 World Cup football.

In the recall of its radio programming there was much more emphasis on the aspirations messages being provided by loveLife.

*Facilitator: How did you guys come to understand what loveLife means?*

*Male participant: I had that idea because sometimes on radio there are programmes that involve loveLife whereby youth ... are sending the message to us as viewers. It's like love yourself, take care of yourself, spreading the information that we must take care of ourselves.*

*Male participant: Be yourself, you are there, you are not a mistake, trying to motivate us.*

*Group: It's a motivational programme because it's all about motivation.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

The use of celebrities in the loveLife programme has also been effective in unpacking the loveLife message and in conveying these messages to young people.

*Facilitator: Are there any images that you can remember from loveLife, any pictures that you can remember from loveLife?*

*Male participant: Not exactly, all we do see is the recent communication like loveLife – Get Attitude but to the Get Attitude issues there are celebrities that do speak to us about the relevant issues or the social issues and how they make it in life. They are celebs and what obstacles do they face in life in order for them to become celebrities. They are trying to encourage us as the youth to also start believing in ourselves and to start to do as they did.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

It is noteworthy that with the exception of Gauteng Group 2 there was no recall of any of the sexualized imagery of youth contained in the loveLife print media and some of the outdoor media.

A similar observation can be made in relation to youth identification with commercial brands. Commercial brands that depicted young people engaging in everyday life or aspirational messages were more readily recalled.

At the time of this study LaCoste was engaged in an advertising campaign for a new fragrance. There was high recall in all the focus groups of this advertisement, indicating the important role of advertising in constructing the meaning of the commercial brand discourse. Identification in this advertisement was associated with the model depicted within the advertisements that is a signifier of attractiveness, youth and playfulness.

*Female participant: LaCoste, I would explain as if he would be a charming guy, cute guy, beautiful guy.*

*Facilitator: Why would you say that?*

*Female participant: I would picture him as a strong guy, tough guy, as a well shaped guy with big arms.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

*Girl: Oo the Lacoste perfume*

*Group: Ja, the guy like jumping around, boy – ok jumps on the pole.*

*(Gauteng, Group 2, March 2006)*

A Levis advertisement that was recalled illustrates the linkages between the model as a symbol of strength and that which the advertiser wishes to convey. This advertisement features a young man with a muscular upper body and a woman embracing him from the back. For the participants in this focus group a connection was made between the strength and beauty symbolised by the model and that of the product, Levi jeans.

*Facilitator: If Levis were your best friend, how would you describe him?*

*Girl: A strong guy, with power, a handsome guy that has brackets*

*Girls: Laugh*

*Girl: He has brackets*

*Girl: Attractive*

*Girl: Ama brackets*

*Boy: Like the brackets that go into his pants*

*Facilitator: Why would you describe Levis like that?*

*Girl: It's strong because you can wear it today and tomorrow and you do not need to wash it everyday.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

Loxion Kulcha is an example of a commercial brand that draws upon South African identity and aspirational messaging to establish identification with the brand. The word “loxion” denotes a township, “location” and/or local while “Kultcha” is play on the word culture.

*Facilitator: But what does the word loxion mean?*

*Boy: It's like a place, small place, like town, like township, it represents the people from the township, the wild music and their culture. It talks about their culture. It's like we are black, where do we come from, living in shells all this stuff. I think it represents that.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

In its messaging Loxion Kucha draws upon the aspirational messages of South Africans transcending the social and economic barriers to establish identity with its target audience. Participant that had a high degree of identification with the story of the loxion Kultcha brand were more likely to recall the brand discourse.

*Male Participant: Because in a while I heard their story. It was a boy who started knitting cones (hats) in his room. He got the idea that people want to buy those hats then he sell them in the township. Then he saw that oh people love these hats. The next days he went to town, then he we went to the government. So they buy it and then he talked to other people and told them about this idea and they helped him start the business called loxion Kultcha and that's where it all started from.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b)*

Celebrities who endorse the brand give meaning to the brand through becoming iconic signifiers of the brand discourse. As iconic bearers of the brand discourse celebrities play an important part in establishing identification with the brand discourse. In this study the meaning of the brand was not decoded from international celebrities but rather through the use of local celebrities, indicating that identification is dependent on people being able to see themselves reflected within the brand discourse rather than as identification being constructed.

**Figure 14: Youth recall of celebrities representing commercial brands**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Celebrity</b>
Levis	Zola
Loxion Kultcha	Chippa and local Kwaito musicians
La Coste	Zandile, Nzambi, Khabelo
Nike	Football players and PSL clubs

### **Us and Them<sup>15</sup> – loveLife, Commercial Brands and Everyday Life**

As indicated the majority of young people in this study decoded the meanings of loveLife through everyday interaction with loveLife through its interpersonal services and interaction with the *groundBREAKERS*.

There are a number of barriers that undermine youth participation in the loveLife interpersonal services<sup>16</sup>.

In three groups, notably KwaZulu-Natal Group 3a and 3b and Gauteng Group 2, there was a lack of awareness of the loveLife services owing to the fact that these services were not available in the areas where these young people live and a failure by loveLife to foreground its youth-friendly services within its media outreach to which most participants had some exposure.

*Facilitator: So you have participated in the loveLife Games. Are there any other loveLife products or services that you have participated in?*

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<sup>16</sup> The findings of this study on the barriers to youth participation in loveLife youth-friendly services are similar to a study undertaken by the Horizons Project

*Group: No, not exactly.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b, October 2005)*

*Facilitator: Have you heard of the loveLife Y-centres?*

*Group: No*

*(Gauteng, Group 2, March 2006)*

Even where young people may live in the vicinity of a loveLife youth centre the distances that young people need to travel to reach these services may dissuade their participation in the programme.

*Facilitator: What about the Y-centre, do you know about the Y-centre?*

*Female participant: Yes*

*Male participant: I have not been there*

*Facilitator: Why have you not been there?*

*Male participant: Because I am too far from it*

*(Gauteng, Group 1, March 2006)*

The participation by female participants in the loveLife interpersonal programmes may be undermined as this competes with other activities and chores that they may need to undertake at home.

*Female participant: You can say that you like to go to loveLife but you are busy at home lets say if at home you take S'camto and you read it.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1, October 2005)*

The use of English in non-English settings by the loveLife in its media programme and through the *groundBREAKERS* constructs a symbolic boundary that undermines identification with the loveLife message and lifestyle.

*Female participant: I think with the young people if you look at the groundBREAKERS, they are people who tell us the shit because young people you don't like it if you come with us and tell us in English.*

*Facilitator: So they talk English when they come they don't talk Zulu?*

*Female participant: Ja*

*Female participant: And S'camto is written by English only*

*Facilitator: And why would you say is that a problem?*

*Female participant: Because young people the most they don't understand English.*

The branding of a particular behaviour by loveLife has drawn a symbolic boundary that distinguishes between those young people that have bought into the loveLife lifestyle and those that have not.

Young people that identify with loveLife define the behaviour of those that have not as doing *wrong things; mixing socially with the wrong people, negatively minded people*. These decodings relate to the manner in which loveLife represents young people who fall outside of its symbolic boundary of “positive attitude”.

The perception of whose behaviour is wrong and needs to change falls more on younger females than on the men. Younger females perceived to be engaging in sexual relationships are described as *sluts, engaging in inferior relationships* or having multiple concurrent partners for transactional purposes.

This links to the dominant representation of young women by loveLife that portrays within its representation young women as sexual entities. Men, and in particular older men, who are engaging in transactional sexual relations with young women are absolved from any responsibility for their sexual behaviours. So, rather than challenging the gender stereotypes and pointing to male behaviour as a key driver of the epidemic, loveLife has reinforced the gender stereotype where women are portrayed as the agency of change and men are absolved from any responsibility for change. Symbolically loveLife is constructed as a place that will transform this young female so that she takes life more seriously.

*Male Participant: Like when a girl is a slut maybe her friends say to her you have got to go to loveLife and got to change your ways of doing things and you have got to take your life very seriously and living what you are and what you are doing everyday.*

*(Male Participant, KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b).*

*Female Participant: There are those girls who after school when they finish doing their things they batch again and then they go hunt for males you see, that's why the older persons can't see them when they are coming home.*

*Facilitator: Are these men the same age?*

*Female participant: No, older men*

*Male participant: Taxi drivers*

*Female participant: Taxi drivers*

*Facilitator: Why taxi drivers?*

*Male participant: They look up to taxi drivers*

*(Gauteng, Focus Group 1, March 2006)*

*Male Participant: ...at loveLife they taught them how to have one boyfriend and to be honest with him and things like that.*

*Male Participant: They don't want to have one boyfriend, it seems to be more stylish to have more than one boyfriend because maybe sometimes I am a girl he is a boy have two boyfriends this one will give me money, this one will give me transport, a car anywhere I want to go.*

*Facilitator: Do the girls agree?*

*Female participants: Yes*

*Female participant: Some they like cars, they like taxi drivers.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group 2, October 2005)*

Conversely young people NOT associated with loveLife draw symbolic markers in relation to those that do and this has resulted in a counter movement by young people who not only oppose the messages that loveLife and *groundBREAKERS* are trying to convey but manipulate these messages to reinforce the meanings that they want to convey.

*Facilitator: What do young people think about the groundBREAKERS, do they identify with the GroundBREAKERS?*

*Female participant: Some of them they don't listen to them because they think that they are wasting their time.*

*Facilitator: Why do they think they are wasting their time?*

*Female participant: Because they are telling them the truth.*

*Male participant: The others who are using alcohol they are not able to listen to such a thing - you must stop to drink beer - and their slogan - you must save water you must drink beer - they have come up with their own slogans and they are not able to listen to the loveLife slogan.*

*Facilitator: So they come up with their own slogans*

*Male participant: Ja, its vice-a-versa sometimes*

*Facilitator: Why do they come up with their own slogans?*

*Male participant: Because they think always that which they are doing it's ok because nobody can disagree with them.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1).*

The naming of one behaviour as being right in relation to another behaviour that is seen to be wrong has given rise to the notion amongst those not participating in loveLife that those do think they are better, which results in name calling.

*Male participant: They call us butter, margerine, they use slang sometimes maybe they want to call you a cheeseboy, a boyfriend, a charmer, they use the slang, like they use butter.*

*Male participant: I think that they are negatively minded.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

The establishment of one set of behaviours in relation to another set of behaviours results in group formation and peer pressure being placed upon young people not to participate in the loveLife programme. This peer pressure acts to discourage participation and engagement in the loveLife services.

*Female Participant: Most of them they like to go there but they are busy doing the wrong things and they are mixing socially with the wrong people. So if your friends maybe like in a group they say we are not going there you don't go there.*

*(Gauteng Group 1, March 2006).*

*Male participant: Here at school we are about 800 and lovelife and dramaide members are thirty to forty.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2, October 2005)*

Where there are conflicting decodings of the messages of loveLife this further undermines participation by young people in the loveLife interpersonal services. For example, in Gauteng Group 1 a participant indicated that he does not identify with the loveLife messages that contradict his Christian beliefs which stand in opposition to the reasons why other young people do not participate in the Y-centre.

*Male participant: No because most of the time I spend listening to music, gospel and playing sports because I am a Christian I am going to church.*

Meaning is also defined according to space and the belonging to a social grouping may differ from one social setting to another.

*Facilitator: I presume that you are all peer educators?*

*Group: Yes*

*Facilitator: So, as peer educators do you find that they listen to you even though they say they don't?*

*Male participant: They listen to us because they like to know but whereas if they are outside (of the school) they call us these names.*

In a similar sense the consumption of commercial brands are used by young consumers within everyday life to express meaning about their identity and to mediate relationships within the social environment. These meanings relate to social status, style, attractiveness, popularity and charm.

*Facilitator: If you can think of any young person that wears these sorts of brands are there any characteristics that you can attribute to them.*

*Female Participant: Confident*

*Female Participant: Pretty*

*Female participant: They make people look attractive.*

*(Gauteng Group 2)*

The social status signified by the brand mediates relationships between young people in everyday life and between boys and girls.

*Facilitator: In your view can you describe to me the young people that do use these brands?*

*Male participant: The young people who wear these brands ... I think it's mostly popular. You will always find the youth wearing these brands because they want to charm, they want to be attractive. Because where I am coming and I meet a girl the first thing the girls looks at me so nice, wonderful ...*

*Group: Laughs*

*Facilitator: Do the girls agree?*

*Girl: Because sometimes guy comes and he wants to talk to me the first thing I do is look at how is he wearing, what is he wearing and if he comes across with those brands then ok lets talk.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2)*

The conferring of social status through the use of the brand gives rise to a situation of “us”, those that wear the brands, and “them”, those that do not wear the brands, which results in group formation and name calling.

*Male participant 1: While you are walking along the road with someone who is not wearing T-shirt for NIKE and you are wearing T-shirt for NIKE all the people are able to look up at that particular person wearing Nike, you are the last.*

*Facilitator: So when you say you are the last, who is last?*

*Male Participant 1: That person maybe who is not wearing maybe the T-shirt for NIKE.*

*Male Participant 2: They use to say when you are not wearing something with a logo they used to say that you are a child. That is why the relationship is not good between them because the one who is wearing the Nike or Lacoste, when he is going with you, is going to say you are child to this one and I am famous because I am wearing the Nike or the LaCoste.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1)*

The conferring of social status through the use of the brand results in peer pressure being placed on young people to enable them to be able to buy branded products. However, it would appear that the social pressure to belong is a lot more on young males than on young females. Young females in particular seem also to be more concerned about matters relating to the price of branded products than young males.

*Male participant: That's why we are being forced sometimes maybe my friend is having something that is having a logo, for example a T-shirt from Lacoste and I don't have I have to try by all means and ways to have to get that T-shirt ... in order to have good relationship with him or her.*

*Male participant: Some they used to steal, because if me I don't have NIKE I want to be seen with him, I go by the shop and steal some money and go out there and buy some T-shirts. That's why young people they must buy the things they can afford.*

*Girl: On the people not wearing NIKE or Lacoste they used to say if I am not wearing Lacoste or NIKE there is nothing they can say to me nobody can question me, why you are not wearing this and they cant force me to buy NIKE or Lacoste, because we are the same we are all wearing.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 1)*

Certain brands used in combination come to signify certain social groupings that give rise to certain identities. In the peri-urban and the rural groups the combination of Dickies or loxion Kutcha "suits" with white All Star tekkies was seen as designating Muntu Pantzula, a lifestyle associated with an identity that signifies gangsterism, criminals "tsotsi stuff" and drug use.

*Male Participant: ... coming to the real township boy or man the way he dresses, what do you call this kind of thing, called muntu pantzula?*

*Male participant: It's like a dance, what we call in South Africa pantzula dance.*

*Male Participant: Maybe he will wear a dickies suit, hat, T-shirt and trousers and tekkies.*

*Male Participant: Ja, its like representing tsotsi stuff because some of them smoke.*

*Male participant: Drugs*

*Male participant: Drugs, ja, most of them.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal Group, 3b)*

*Male Participant: And these brands most popularly used by gangsters and criminals like tekkies of All Stars, when you wear All Stars then you think things will never move, when you wear them they conclude that you are a gangster.*

*Male Participant: But that depends on what you are wearing with, what you combination. They can wear All Stars down there and sometimes you see these guys wearing the All Stars and a suit. He comes that I am a gangster he check me I say ok I see this man.*

*(KwaZulu-Natal, Group 2)*

## **Summary**

Du Gay, Hall et al (1997) examine the manner in which consumers decode meaning from a cultural artifact, namely the Walkman. In doing so, they rely primarily on sales data and not qualitative data. Sales figures do not provide an explanation for the meanings that consumers decode of the Sony Walkman in everyday life and the manner in which consumers manipulate these meanings to signify meaning of themselves in relation to their social environment.

In an increasingly complex communications environment the manner in which consumers come to decode the meaning of brand discourses is dependent upon:

- the communications and media that they have access to.

As demonstrated in this study, young people's decodings of loveLife and commercial brands were dependent upon the media they had access to, which are related to their socio-economic situation. Youth in rural and peri-urban areas were more likely to engage with the loveLife interpersonal services and local radio programme and less likely to engage with the loveLife publications and outdoor media. Middle-class and

upper-middle class youth were exposed to loveLife primarily through its print media products and outdoor media. These youth have greater media at their exposure through satellite television and programmes. Decodings of the meanings of loveLife were dependent on the media through which young people came to understand the meanings of loveLife. Youth exposed to loveLife through its interpersonal services and radio programmes had a narrower decoding that correlated more closely to those intended by loveLife. Youth exposed to loveLife only through its mass media programmes had discrepant decodings. However, these decodings are not necessarily discrepant for as indicated in the chapter on representations the highly sexualised image of young people, the oppositional relationship with parents and the notion of the positive versus the negative lifestyle are produced and circulated by loveLife through its media programme. This study also questions the assumptions by the producers of the loveLife brand that young people who interact with the loveLife billboard will also interact with the other media through which loveLife circulates its meaning. Rather, the meanings of loveLife are constructed through the fragments of messages that young people are exposed to over time, which enable them to construct a global picture in their minds of what the brand discourse – loveLife – represents.

- the extent to which the brand discourse captures and holds their attention

loveLife competes for the attention and the limited free time that youth have available to participate. Participation in its interpersonal services competes with household chores, school activities and other activities that young people undertake. Its media products compete with other media programmes for the attention of young people. The participation of young people is dependent on the extent to which they self-identify or do not with the loveLife discourse.

- the extent to which consumers self-identify with a brand is dependent upon the degree to which they self-identify the stereotypes and stories represented within the brand discourse and circulated through the mass media and marketing activities undertaken to promote the brand discourse.

The most popular loveLife messages recalled by young people across the socio-economic divide were those messages that affirmed and represented positive images of youth, such as “love to be there 2010”. There were very low levels of unaided recall by young people of the highly sexualised images of youth represented by loveLife in its media products. The highly sexualised imagery of girls gave rise to the

impression that loveLife services are a place to which girls engaging in sex could be sent so that they could change their behaviour. Young people who did not identify with the loveLife brand discourse were unlikely to consume the loveLife services, such as young people who were religious, or those that did not identify with the behaviours being promoted by loveLife. Identification with the loveLife discourse is dependent upon young people being able to make sense of the language used by loveLife. In non-speaking areas where *groundBREAKERS* used English there were lower levels of identification with the brand discourse. In areas where young people were unable to decode the sub-brand and product-naming system, loveLife was seen as excluding them.

- the manner in which the brand discourse is appropriated within everyday life is used by consumers to signify meaning of themselves.

Having heard or seen of a brand and knowing through which medium consumers are exposed to the brand discourse is a poor indicator for assessing the quality of the message. To assess the quality of the message requires that the meanings that consumers attach to brands, the manner or media through which they come to understand these meanings, be correlated with those intended by the producers of the brand within their strategies and encoded by the cultural intermediaries.

While du Gay et al (1997a) examine the consumption of the Sony Walkman in relation to sales figures, they do not examine how consumers make meaning of the Walkman and the manner in which this is appropriated within everyday life to signify meaning. This study suggests that while the circuit of culture does provide an appropriate method for examining the manner in which consumers make meaning of brand discourses that are produced and represented, this needs to be expanded upon by including a circuit of consumption.

The addition of a circuit of consumption acknowledges that consumers are not only active in the making of meaning but that they use brands as cultural artefacts within everyday life to signify meaning of themselves to others and that gives rise to group formation.

*Representation/Consumption* – The moment of representation/consumption involves the decoding of the enduring and non-enduring signs of the brand that are produced by the cultural producers and encoded by the cultural intermediaries and circulated

through communications programmes to signify the meanings that the producer of the brand seeks to convey. The extent to which consumers are interpellated into the brand discourse is dependent on the extent to which the brand discourse captures the attention of the consumer and the manner in which they decode and identify with the discourse represented through the visual and verbal codes of the brand.

As indicated in this study, in the decoding of loveLife there is not one dominant meaning but rather many meanings informed through the degree and media of exposure to the representation of the loveLife brand. These meanings vary. Exposure to the loveLife interpersonal programmes results in the brand being decoded as a signifier for sports and cultural activities, sexual and reproductive health meanings, issues relating to motivation and belief in the future. This illustrates the benefit of interpersonal communications in unpacking complex themes and messages that enable young people to form an understanding of the meanings that loveLife is wanting to convey.

However, unmediated the outdoor and print media give rise to a discrepant decoding of the positive lifestyle that loveLife is attempting to convey that may result in unintended consequences of added peer pressure for young people to engage in sexual activities.

*Consumption/Identification* - While consumers may interpret meanings from communications programmes, these are not static but are rather appropriated by consumers within everyday life to express meaning about themselves. The degree to which consumers appropriate these meanings within their everyday lives is dependent on the degree of identification with meanings decoded of the brand discourse.

Identification with the brand discourse occurs when the consumer appropriates the enduring signs of the brand within everyday life to signify meaning about his or her identity. In doing so the consumer says "Yes, this is me." Appropriation of the enduring sign may be through the display of the enduring brand signs on a fashion item, or through frequenting spaces that are constructed as text through the display of the enduring signs.

Language and being able to decode the meaning of the brand discourse plays an important role in the decoding and identification with the brand discourse. The inability to decode the meanings undermines identification. For example, the

*groundBREAKERS* were described as “speaking shit” when talking to young people in English. Another group felt that loveLife was not for them as the product-naming system used codes they were unable to translate and identify with.

Identification occurs through the consumption of the enduring signs of the brand discourse. This includes 1) the symbolic display of the brand name and/or symbol on a piece of clothing or a uniform, such as the S’camto *groundBREAKERS* uniform or wearing a loveLife T-shirt. 2) frequenting services (such as a youth centre) or participating in programmes (such as a volunteer or the loveLife Games) that are branded with the brand name and symbols.

The appropriation of the enduring brand signs symbolically interpellates the consumer as an embodiment of the brand discourse in everyday life. Through appropriating the brand the consumer encodes meaning about him/herself within the social environment that draws upon the representation of the brand discourse to say “Yes, this is me”.

Consumption and identification is not constant but varies according to social setting and is space-specific, for example young people may consult youth peer educators in the school setting but ridicule them outside of the school setting. Likewise a consumer may wear NIKE to a gym or social setting but less likely within the workplace.

*Consumption/Identity-Group Formation* – Brands are symbolic markers that define who is included and who is excluded and seek to ensure that the largest numbers of consumers are included within their symbolic boundary so as to capture as large a slice of the market as possible.

Through appropriating the enduring brand signs the consumer becomes a symbolic bearer of the brand discourse that is represented and given meaning through the non-enduring brand signs that construct the brand discourse. In everyday life consumers encode meaning of themselves which is decoded by others that gives rise to group formation which forms a symbolic boundary defining those included and those excluded.

The formation of social groupings is dependent upon the degree of identification with the brand discourse.

Consumers with high levels of identification become bearers of the brand discourse and may form a group. For example, young people who volunteer as “mphintsi’s” or volunteer peer educators have a higher degree of identification with the brand discourse and through becoming peer educators and taking up the brand discourse within their social settings become icons of the discourse that they represent. Identity is expressed through the display of the enduring brand signs and/or through frequenting services that become symbolic spaces of the brand discourse as represented through the non-enduring brand signs.

Consumers with low levels of identification may discard the brand discourse as not being relevant or may form a counter movement or counter group. Just as meaning is constructed through the decoding of signs in relation to their opposites so to are social movements or groups defined in relation to their opposites.

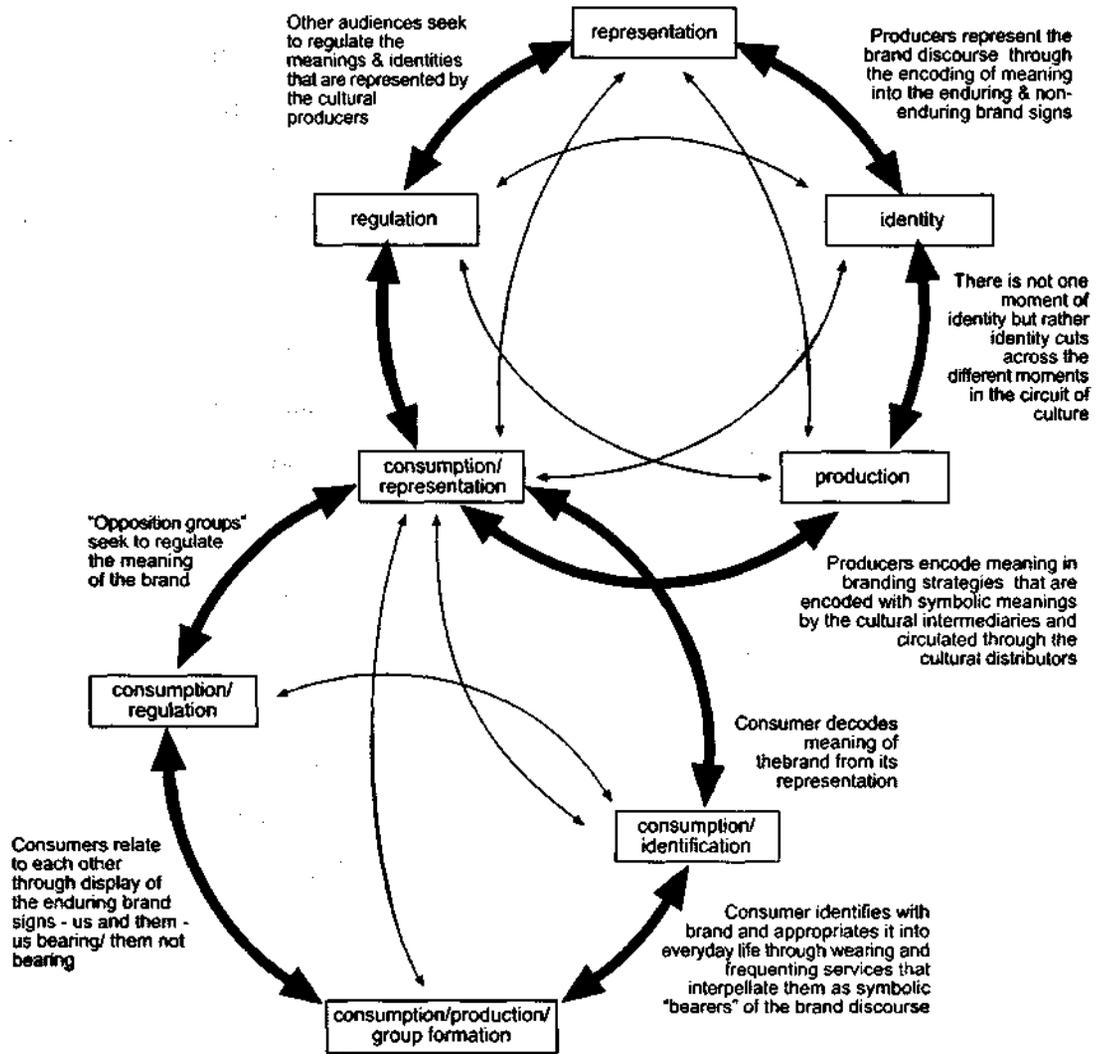
For example, loveLife promotes a positive lifestyle the meaning of which is defined by those who buy into the lifestyle proposition as a set of values relating to sexual and reproductive health, future, and motivation. The symbolic demarcation of boundaries of that which are considered right and wrong gives rise to a symbolic membership of a group, much like a gang or a sub-culture, which is engaged in a struggle for meaning and membership. This demarcation of behaviour has given rise to an opposite social movement that seeks to undermine the discourse that loveLife is attempting to convey that seeks to regulate the meanings that loveLife is attempting to convey through distorting the loveLife messages to signify the meanings that they wish to convey.

#### *Consumption/Regulation*

The formation of counter movements or opposites seeks to regulate the meanings that are being constructed through the dominant discourse. In the case of loveLife, for example, the branding of this lifestyle has given rise to an opposition discourse that gives names to those participating in the loveLife programme and slogans that draw upon those produced by loveLife, but that are distorted to reflect an opposite lifestyle to that which loveLife is promoting.

While the formation of opposition movements may seek to regulate the meanings of loveLife within the social setting, other audiences that interact with the meanings that loveLife transmits may also seek to regulate these meanings.

**Figure 15: The Circuit of Culture and the Circuit of Consumption**



## Chapter 7: Regulating loveLife

Regulation involves the setting of rules, norms and conventions through which meanings are regulated and social life is organized. Regulation, therefore, not only pertains to the realm of government policy, legislation and politics, but also to how discourses are regulated socially and morally through carcereal networks of power that control access to knowledge.

In the chapter on representation a semiotic analysis was provided of the discourse used by loveLife in its media programme to communicate meanings about its positive lifestyle. This chapter concluded that the identity myth that loveLife offers through its media programme leans more to the connotative meanings of the brand, namely that of sex and sexual relationships, and that while it seeks to bring about a national discussion on issues relating to youth, adolescent sex and HIV prevention, its representation portrays parents and youth in oppositional relationships where parents are seen as withholding secrets of sex from their children, which loveLife will reveal.

The chapter on consumption showed that there is not one meaning of the loveLife lifestyle brand but rather an array of meanings, and that the extent to which young people decode the meanings of loveLife in relation to those intended by its producers is dependent upon the media through which young people came to understand the meanings of loveLife.

Young people that interact with the loveLife interpersonal services are more likely to decode the meanings in relation to those intended by loveLife and to identify with its lifestyle proposition that gives rise to group formation. However, at the same time young people that do not identify with the loveLife messages may either not associate themselves with the programme or may join an oppositional group that seeks to socially regulate the messages that loveLife is trying to convey, including participation in the loveLife programmes.

loveLife's own study shows that fewer than 5% of young people are reached through its interpersonal services and this study indicates that there are a number of barriers that constrain the participation of young people in the loveLife interpersonal services. The vast majority of young people decode the meanings of loveLife through interaction with its media programme. One group who only interacted with loveLife

through its media programme had a discrepant decoding of loveLife, decoding it in relation to the connotative meaning of sex, and not in relation to safer sex. loveLife messages that depicted young people engaging in everyday activities and that were aspirational by nature were more readily recalled than the highly sexualized images of youth used by loveLife.

Media messages targeting young people are not only consumed by the youth. Other audiences such as parents, religious groups, AIDS activists and academics also interact daily with the loveLife messages through consumption of its outdoor media campaign, its print publications, radio and television programmes. These audiences may be described as carcereal networks of power that seek to regulate knowledge in relation to adolescent sexuality and HIV prevention. These audiences are less likely to interact with the loveLife interpersonal services<sup>17</sup>.

The representation of adolescent sexuality in the loveLife media programme may be regarded by these carcereal networks of power as transgressing the unspoken boundaries that exist between that which is considered the realm of the public (that which may be spoken of) and that which is private (or should be left unspoken) – such as sex.

In the chapter on consumption it was indicated that there are a number of cultural and social barriers that may impede parent-to-child discussions on issues relating to adolescent sexuality.

This chapter will examine the decodings of parents and religious organizations of the representation of the loveLife lifestyle brand. To obtain the views of parents on loveLife, this study draws upon the focus groups undertaken with young people and a literature review to analyse the views of religious organizations.

This research is exploratory and further research is required to examine the meanings that parents decode of the loveLife brand, the extent to which this has informed parent-to-child interaction on adolescent sexuality and the manner in which

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<sup>17</sup> loveLife did initiate a parent campaign aimed at encouraging parents to interact with their youth on issues relating to youth sexuality. In the *NAFCI Clinics* the *groundBreakers* have a corner available in the adult section of the clinic where they talk to parents about the work that loveLife is undertaking. However, as of 2004 there were only 235 clinics operating around the country (loveLife 2004). On the loveLife website there is also a section that aims to encourage and provide parents with information on issues relating to sex and sexuality.

these decodings may result in parents seeking to regulate the participation of their youth in the programme.

As mentioned in the Introduction and the chapter on production these are not the only audiences that have sought to regulate the meanings of loveLife. Organisations representing people living with HIV (see Saturday Star 2003) and AIDS service organizations (see Businessday 2006; www.cadre.org.za) have also at times sought to regulate the meanings of loveLife and so too have academic researchers (see Jordaan 2006; Parker 2005, Thomas 2005; Morrison 2003; Templeton 2003; Delate 2001) and HIV commentators (see Epstein 2003; Delate 2003; Halperin and Williams 2001). As these have been cited in other parts of this thesis, they will not be repeated in this chapter.

### **Parents' and Grandparents' decodings of loveLife**

The ability of parents and grandparents to decode the meanings of loveLife is linked to literacy and illiteracy, particularly in the rural areas. Illiteracy undermines the ability of parents to decode the meanings that loveLife is trying to convey and gives rise to a discrepant decoding of the loveLife brand. This results in parents and grandparents reacting negatively to the programme and leads to a division between young people and adults.

*Male participant: If people are illiterate it is not easy to understand what loveLife means because like our grandmothers most of them are illiterate so if you tell them about loveLife they will just chase you. Because they do not understand what loveLife means (KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3b).*

As with young people there appears to be many decodings of the meanings of loveLife by parents. The meaning of the brand discourse is decoded by some parents as teaching young people to engage in sexual relations. This correlates to the decoding of the sexual imagery used by loveLife in its media campaign to represent loveLife to adolescent sexuality. Where this representation is considered to be in opposition to the moral values of the family, parents appear to regulate participation in the loveLife interpersonal programme.

*Female Participant: Others they don't because they think that at loveLife they teach their children wrong things because parents they hide sexual*

*information and they tell their children don't go there they teach them wrong things.*

*Male participant: ...they say loveLife says you must use a condom and parents say you must abstain.*

*Group: Laughs*

*Male Participant: They think that loveLife says that you must keep having sex and in the home they don't, they say you must abstain.*

*(Gauteng Group 1, March 2006)*

The positioning by loveLife as a peer to young people that provides them with information on sex and sexuality and that dislodges parents from this responsibility gives rise to two contrasting reactions.

Parents who are uncomfortable in addressing issues relating to adolescent sexuality see loveLife as a good thing as it relieves them of this responsibility. However, the displacement of parents as the source of information on adolescent sexuality may be opposed to loveLife if loveLife is seen to replace that which should essentially be their role and function.

*Female Participant: I think parents love life because loveLife teaches their children about things that our parents are scared to talk to us about like sex and things like that (KwaZulu-Natal, Group 3a).*

*Female Participant: I think that my mother does not like loveLife because she has never told me that before but because I have been told by loveLife to abstain from sex and I must be proud of myself because I am a special person.*

### **Religious Groupings Decodings of loveLife**

Religious groupings have mounted several efforts to regulate the loveLife outdoor media through the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa. In decoding the meanings of the loveLife outdoor media, religious organizations have primarily decoded these as being contrary to the moral values that they judged the loveLife outdoor media to be promoting.

In 2000 Christian groupings objected to a set of loveLife billboards with the following messages: "What if the condom comes off when he is inside me?" (13 Year

old Nomsa)’; “I had sex, will I die?”(Siphiwe age 14)’ “My boyfriend just wants sex” (Melissa age 15).

The objections by the religious groupings were primarily owing to what they considered to be sexually explicit language; the inappropriate placement of the billboards in the vicinity of primary school; that the messages implicitly endorse sex at an early age and may encourage youngsters to engage in sex. The Advertising Standards Committee (ASC) ruled as follows:

*...the two advertisements as a whole did not make it clear that the statements used on the billboards were related to AIDS or to an educational programme dealing with AIDS. Out of context and in isolation the slice of life statements were perceived to offend consumer sensitivities. Accordingly the ASC said that it should be made clear on the billboards that the advertising material relates to the television programme S'camto which would be broadcast on e-TV at a particular time...The ASC also found that where the billboards were insensitively placed, they could offend “pockets” of society exposed to them and such insensitive placement would result in breach of clause ... dealing with mental, moral or emotional harm to children...The majority of the ASC directed that these amendments to the advertisements and the sensitive placing of the billboards should take place within the deadlines stipulated in the procedural code to the guide.*

*(Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa, 6 April 2001)*

The ruling of the ASC was later set aside following an appeal by loveLife that provided research that showed that early education of young people and discussions with young people on issues relating to sex did have an impact in delaying the onset of sex, that the location of the billboards were on major commuter thoroughfares, and that there were no objections from commuters (Advertising Standards Authority 2001).

In 2003, another complaint was lodged at ASA targeted at the billboard “One Roll On Every Women Wants” depicting a women holding a condom. Religious groups regarded the advertisements as offensive to those who value sex beyond casual relationships, and as harmful to children who may not be able to tell the difference and thereby result in moral harm to children. Offense was particularly taken at the

hyperbole suggesting that the decision to have sex is the equivalent to the decision to purchase cosmetics. This complaint was dismissed by ASA (PE Churchnet 2001).

Opposition by religious groupings was not only limited to those in South Africa. In the United States the Religious Right launched a campaign targeting UNICEF owing to the fact that UNICEF was engaged in supporting the loveLife campaign at its inception. According to these groups the association of UNICEF with loveLife was seen to be a de facto expression of support for the perceived pro-abortion stance of loveLife, the promotion of sexual autonomy, experimentation and promiscuity (Sylva 2003).

### **Summary**

This section has demonstrated that there are carceral networks of power at play that do try and regulate the meanings that loveLife circulates through its mass media. As with youth decodings of loveLife there is not one meaning that parents decode of loveLife. Rather, there are many meanings and often these are contradictory to those intended by the producers. Where the meanings and social identities proposed by loveLife are seen to undermine the moral standards of the household, this results in parents limiting the access of their children to participate in the loveLife programme.

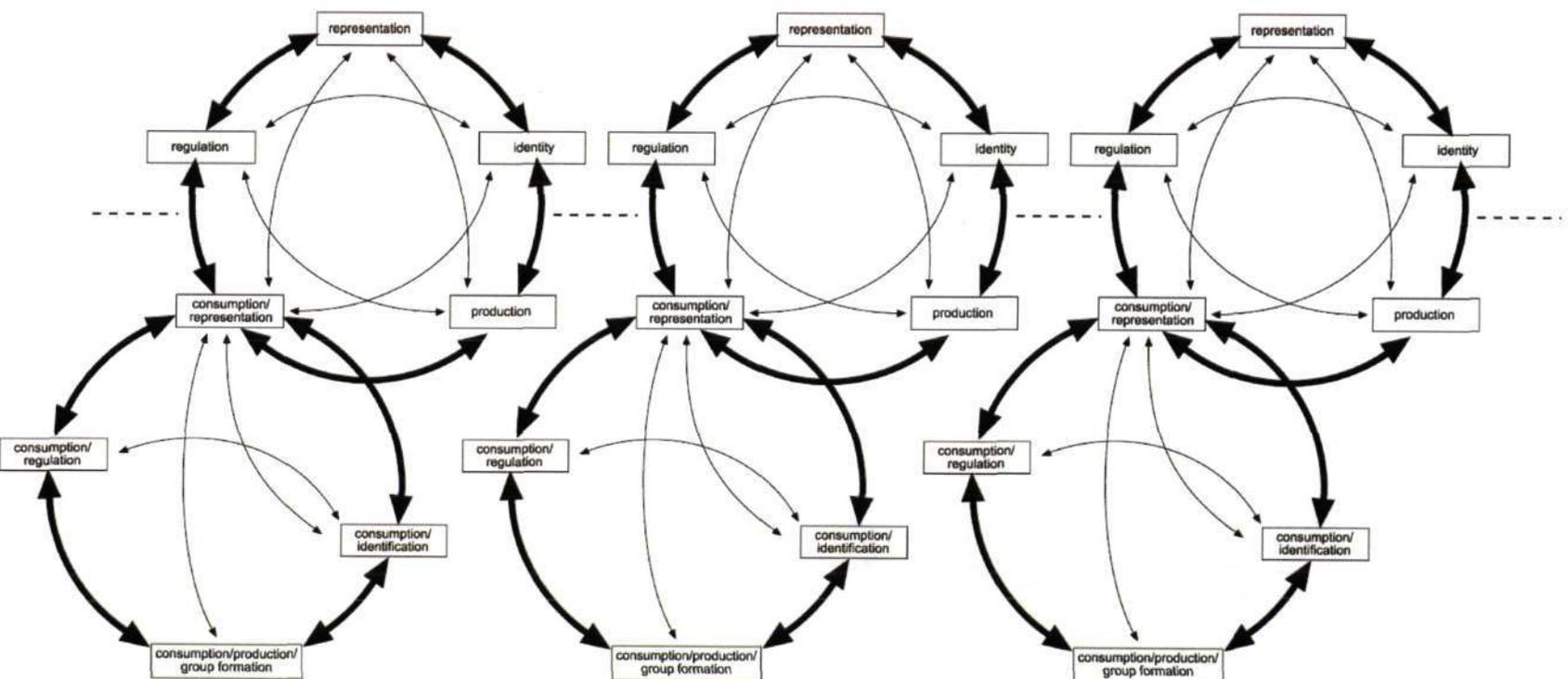
Religious groups that regard the meanings as contradictory to their stated moral points of view also seek to regulate the meanings of loveLife through using formal channels of regulation that relate to the legal and policy remit such as the Advertising Standards Authority of South Africa.

As Piotrow et al (1997) point out, parents and religious leaders are gatekeepers through which public health programmes need to move to be able to reach their intended target audience. If these audiences feel alienated from the programme or if the programme is perceived not to be in the interest of their children, they can block access.

## Conclusion

The Circuit of Culture provides a framework through which the articulation of brand discourses can be studied. As demonstrated in this study, each brand has its own circuit of culture through which we can study its 1) representation, 2) the manner in which it is produced and circulated, 3) the meanings that consumers decode of the brand and the manner in which these meanings are appropriated within everyday life through the bearing of the brand or through frequenting spaces and places that are symbolically constructed as text through the bearing the enduring brand signs and that are regulated through other audiences. The manner in which we come to understand brands is through the relation of each brand circuit of culture to its “opposite”. In this manner brands come to serve as both markers of similarity in relation to the product field and markers of difference in relation to competing brands in the same product field.

Figure 16: Brands in relation to each other



The meaning of the brand discourse is articulated at different points along the circuit of culture. Meaning is dependent upon the manner in which the meanings of

the brand discourse comprising the enduring and non-enduring brand signs are produced or encoded by its producers within their branding or communications strategies. These meanings are symbolically encoded through the cultural intermediaries comprising advertisers, public relations practitioners and journalists and circulated through the cultural distributors of the mass media.

Using the example of loveLife it was illustrated that the meanings of loveLife were produced by the organization to advance its objectives of reducing HIV amongst young people using a branding strategy. Its approach to HIV prevention was outlined in numerous documents guided by a theoretical framework as articulated through Harrison & Steinberg (2002), the loveLife communications strategy (2002) and a number of other organizational documents. The meanings outlined in these documents were symbolically encoded through cultural intermediaries that comprise professionals either located within loveLife or those that are subcontracted to symbolically represent the loveLife lifestyle brand. In linking production to consumption, loveLife used research both in the formative stages of its development as well as throughout its implementation to monitor the success of the programme. However, as Parker (2005) has pointed out, both the formative research and the monitoring of the programme are limited owing to limitations in the study design.

In circulating its meanings loveLife has attempted to achieve synergy through combining the software for HIV prevention, namely the mass media with the hardware namely that of HIV prevention services for young people. While its media programme may have resulted in an awareness of its name, this has not translated into consumption of its services as depicted through its own study, which shows that less than 5% of young people consume its interpersonal services. This is owing to the lack of its media adequately representing its service delivery through its marketing activities, the lack of widespread availability of its services that hamper participation by young people, the lack of identification with the symbolic representation of the brand discourse, which undermines participation in its programmes and gives rise to peer pressure.

The manner in which the meaning of the brand discourse is learnt is through the display of the enduring brand signs (brand name, colour, slogan, sub-brand) that are given meaning through the telling of stories and construction of stereotypes that comprise the non-enduring brand signs that are represented within advertising, public

relations, sponsorships and interpersonal communication. The enduring signs are the most important signs within the brand code as they enable the non-enduring signs to be symbolically framed as standing for or representing the brand discourse that over time gives rise to the brand identity. The displaying of the enduring signs on media texts, people and spaces in everyday life draws a symbolic boundary that places these as belonging to a particular brand discourse.

This study used a semiotics approach to study the representation of the loveLife lifestyle brand. In its representation the meanings represented through the media programme of loveLife leaned more towards the connotative meanings of the brand name emphasizing sex and sexuality. It highlighted that rather than challenging conventional gender, youth and sexual stereotypes the representation of the loveLife brand reinforced these. This may have the unintended consequence of increasing peer pressure on young people.

In consumption these meanings stand in opposition to each other. The global sign or brand identity myth of what loveLife represents is dependent upon the nature of interaction that young people have with the loveLife brand, which gives rise to contrasting and conflicting meanings. The manner in which young people decode these meanings is dependent upon their interaction with the loveLife brand. From the focus groups it is apparent that the loveLife interpersonal communications and radio programmes emphasise messages that link into an array of meanings from aspirational (self-belief) to sexual and reproductive health. However, unmediated its print and outdoor media have given rise to a different meaning of young people engaging in sex.

This study questions the assumption by the producers of loveLife that audiences that interact with its billboards will necessarily interact with its other services. The low levels of awareness of the loveLife services in areas where loveLife does not have a interpersonal service demonstrates the failure by loveLife to use its mass media to effectively support its service delivery. Therefore, while loveLife had an unprecedented opportunity to bring about synergy between the software for HIV prevention (seeing the coke) and the hardware (experiencing the coke) it has failed to achieve this. This study also demonstrates that in everyday life audiences are unlikely to interact with each image and in an increasingly complex media environment with each medium loveLife employs to convey the meanings of its brand.

Rather, consumers develop a coherent understanding of the meanings of the brand discourse through the fragments of the messages they interact with. This points to the need for brand managers to ensure consistency over time as well as across different media formats of the meanings and social identities they wish to represent. This is illustrated through the manner in which commercial brands, unlike the loveLife brand, have constructed consistent meanings of that which they wish to represent over time and over different platforms. In constructing this meaning the non-enduring brand signs (the stereotypes and stories represented in advertisements, the celebrities that become iconic bearers of the brand discourse) are carefully selected to reinforce at each interaction that consumers may have with the enduring brand signs the meanings producers want to convey.

As this study indicates, in everyday life meaning is not passively decoded by the consumer, rather the meanings of brands are actively decoded. In decoding the brand discourse consumers gain knowledge of that which the brand discourse represents which confers upon them the power to act.

The extent to which consumers take up the offer of the brand discourse is dependent upon the extent to which they identify with the brand discourse. Identification is dependent upon a number of factors including the language that enables them to make sense of the brand discourse and the extent to which they see themselves reflected within the stereotypes and stories that represent the brand discourse, the media through which they come to understand these meanings and whether the brand discourse conveys the right meaning about themselves.

Through using the example of loveLife it was demonstrated that language is a major determinant in identification with the brand discourse. Where *groundBREAKERS* speak English in predominantly non-English speaking environments, it resulted in lower levels of identification, with the groundbreakers being described as people “that tell us shit”. In this instance the ability of the consumer to gain knowledge to act is undermined and results in a rejection of the brand discourse. Similar observations were found in areas where participants were unable to decode the meanings of the sub-brand *S’camto* and the product-naming system. In this instance loveLife was decoded as not being for them.

The unaided recall of advertisements depicting young people engaging in everyday activities versus the highly sexualized imagery of youth depicted by loveLife in its

mass media programme illustrates that young people are more likely to identify with the stereotypes in which they see themselves portrayed.

Where consumers identify with the meanings of the brand discourse they appropriate these meanings within everyday life and in doing so encode meaning about themselves that makes them symbolic bearers of the brand discourse.

Consumers become symbolic bearers of the brand discourse through displaying the enduring brand signs on their person (e.g. fashion brands, the use of a T-shirt that displays the brand name, symbol or slogan) or through frequenting spaces that are symbolically constructed as texts by displaying the enduring brand signs, such as a loveLife Y-centre or clinic. In this manner the meaning of the brand moves from the symbolic world to the real world in which consumers live and interact every day. The appropriation of the brand discourse within everyday life may give rise to group formation defined in relation to the meanings decoded of the brand discourse.

As illustrated by this study there is a group of young people that do identify with the loveLife discourse and that have actively appropriated this discourse as part of their everyday lives through becoming peer educators that construct them as symbolic bearers of the loveLife discourse.

However, where there is no identification with the brand discourse, it may lead to consumers appropriating another brand that does reflect their sense of self. It may also give rise to opposition movements that use the meanings of the brand discourse to reflect the meanings they wish to convey and in so doing regulate the meanings of the brand discourse in everyday life, as demonstrated through the twisting of the loveLife slogan by youth, or name calling of young people engaged in loveLife by youth that do not identify with the loveLife discourse.

The circuit of culture as reflected by Du Gay (1997a) concerns itself primarily with the manner in which consumers decode the meanings of cultural artefacts as they are produced by the producer of the brand. Their analysis of the struggle for meaning does not take into account the manner in which consumers appropriate and use the symbolic meanings of brands within everyday life and the struggle for meaning that this gives rise to everyday life. Therefore it is proposed that the circuit of culture be extended to include a circuit of consumption that recognises the active involvement of audiences in decoding the brand discourse within their everyday lives through the

appropriation or rejection of the brand discourse and the social groupings that this gives rise to.

However, the struggle for meaning is not only limited to the producers of the brand discourse and their “target audience”. Rather there are “carcereal networks of power” that seek to regulate the manner in which brands are represented in everyday life and the identities they give rise to, especially where this pertains to young people. These “carcereal networks of power” comprise parents, religious groupings and others that seek to regulate the meanings of brands based upon their decoding of the brand discourse as it is represented within media texts and through the media they come into contact with during the brand discourse.

It is noteworthy that the decoding of the loveLife brand by young people not engaging with loveLife, by parents and religious groupings correlate to those that were observed in the semiotic analysis of the loveLife brand, where the representation is aligned towards the connotative meanings of the brand name, namely sex and sexual relationships between young people.

Where these “networks” regard the brand discourse as contrary to their moral and social beliefs or contrary to their sense of identity, they seek to regulate the meanings of the brand discourse through legal means (eg. appeals to the Advertising Standards Authority) or through regulating access to the media and spaces that are symbolically defined by the enduring signs of the brand (eg. preventing young people from participating in loveLife activities or reading loveLife’s print publications).

This study cautions those engaged in the production of meanings and messages concerning social issues, such as HIV prevention, not only to consider the meanings that audiences decode from their campaigns, but also to examine the social identities these give rise to and the extent to which these identities support or undermine their efforts and manner in which the “carcereal networks of power” seek to regulate these meanings.

It proposes that the quality of messages be measured in relation to the meanings that consumers and the carcereal networks of power decode, the social identities that these give rise to, and that these be correlated with those intended by the producers of messages as articulated within their strategies and encoded by the cultural intermediaries, and circulated through different media.

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