# REPRESENTATION OF BLACK AFRICAN WOMEN'S BODIES IN THE SOAP OPERA, GENERATIONS

## FUNEKA E. THABETHE

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts (Gender Studies)

in the

Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences

University of KwaZulu-Natal  (Howard College Campus)

**Supervisor: Professor T. Magwaza**                    **December: 2008**

i

# DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated in the text, is my own original work. This research has not been submitted to any other institution for degree purposes.


Name:                           Funeka E. Thabethe

Student Number:            205525199

Date:                            15 December 2008

Signature:

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FOR

KWAZI AND KHULANI

THABETHE

# ABSTRACT

Feminists have always taken an interest in the manner in which the media represents women. This is due to the fact that the media is always accused of representing women in an unfavourable manner. If not under-represented, women are objectified or used to perpetuate negative stereotypes about women in general. Research demonstrates that the media has moved from under-representation of women. However, equal representation to men or overrepresentation of women does not necessarily mean correct representation.

This dissertation is based on the soapi opera *Generations,* a soapie where female characters outnumber male characters. The purpose of this dissertation is to look at the manner in which black African women characters' bodies are represented. The women characters' bodies have been studied as social constructions with an underlying message. Foucault's ideas of subjectivity were employed to look at the unlimited possibilities as well as limitations of the body. Subjectivity when looking at bodies have been analysed through the flexibility of bodies to be changed through discipline, body gestures as well as adornment with jewellery and other accessories. Moreover, the underlying culture behind the various constructions was studied.

The findings were that in the soapi opera *Generations,* the representation of women characters' bodies was highly influenced by western culture. The choice of a character's body size, hair texture and complexion is mainly that which is defined as beautiful in western culture.

**Keywords: The body, soapies, women.**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS:

## CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

## CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

# CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS' BODIES

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study is based on the South African soapie *Generations*. *Generations* is a daily prime-time soapie which runs on SABC1. Brown (1994) defines soapies as a continuous programme with open-ended episodes, set in the present and containing a number of alternating story lines. Brown (ibid) further claims that soapies provide images and plots that are of special interest to women, that are sufficiently open and are sufficiently related to a woman's life context to be worked on by women together to generate symbols of resistance and ways of rethinking the role definitions of women, and consequently those of men too.

*Generations* is about the lifestyle of middle-aged, middle-class black African men and women. The focus of this study is the manner in which black African women are represented in this soapie. The cast in *Generations* is predominantly black and women outnumber men. The term black is inclusive of Indians, Coloureds, Chinese as well as Africans. For the purpose of this study I focused on black African women characters. What drew my interest to the soapie is that it is a first of its kind to be directed by a black African male.

Mfundi Vundla, the director of the soapie is a sixty-four year old South African male who spent most of his time in America. He was in exile there and only came after South Africa got its liberation in 1994. Some scholars, writing on women characters in South African soapies, like Sekayi (2003) and Wood-Hunter (2005), state that the media encourages black female South Africans to adopt white female South African's attitudes towards their bodies.

Furthermore they say that when Black women are represented they are expected to meet the related western ideals of beauty in terms of body type, skin colour and hair texture. According to Sekayi (2003), the ideal western body is synonymous with beauty, success, extreme concern about health and self control. Sekayi and Wood-Hunters (ibid)) statements above about reperesentation of women prompted me to try and establish if Vundla's long stay in America did not influence his understanding of African beauty. Could this manifest itself in the manner in which he represents African women's bodies in the soapie *Generations*?

De Cassanova (2004) states that black African women have traditional body features that separate them from women of other races. According to De Cassanova (ibid) those features are a heavier body, natural unrelaxed hair, big bust, broad hips and dark skins. De Cassanova (ibid) further states that black women are believed to be comfortable in heavier bodies because there is a

perception that, that is what black men look for in romantic partners. I therefore looked at any representations of women's bodies that could be emanating from this perception.

Price (1999) points out that the body is a site of intense inquiry in full acknowledgement of possibilities of differential embodiment. I also explored the possibility of the existence of different capabilities and powers (Price, 1999), unlimited possibilities (Grosz, 1994) as well as limitations (Smith, 1993) in the manner that black African women characters' bodies are constructed in the soapie *Generations*. Shilling (1993) acknowledges the possibilities of remaking the body but also highlights the limitations that may exist. I have therefore tried to establish if there are any limitations in the way that bodies can be manipulated.

This study is grounded in the social constructionist's approach. This approach views the body as a phenomenon which is somehow shaped, constrained and even invented by society (Shilling, 1993). The analysis of this study is largely informed by two scholars of social constructionism, i.e. Foucault and Shilling. The Foucauldian approach to the body has been adopted. This approach views the body as a socially constructed product which is infinitely malleable and highly unstable (Shilling, 1993). Moreover, Shilling's ideas on the body as a phenomenon of options and choices will be used as a point of departure.

Price (1999) posits that female soapie characters' bodies can be classified according to certain categories. My intention was to find out if any of the *Generations* black African women characters' bodies representations fitted into any of the following categories as laid down by Price (1999) and Bonnie *(2006);* i.e.

- The body as a site of male gaze.

- The body as an object of display.

- The beautiful but lacking intelligence body.

- The body as an object of remaking: docile.

- The body as unreliable, out of control and set against the force of reason.

- The body represented as weak, prone to hormonal irregularities, intrusions and unpredictabilities.

The above-mentioned categories have been further analysed under the following codes proposed by MacDonald (1995) for soapie characters:

- Weight: do the characters have a particular shape and size?

- Do women characters engage in some form of activity to change the appearance of their bodies?

- Do the characters use make up to enhance their looks?

What I found out from the study was the fact that Vundla's long stay in America did influence his perceptions of beauty as most black African women characters' bodies reflect what Sekayi (2003) views as western ideals of beauty; this is where the body is synonymous with beauty, success, extreme concern about health and self control. Moreover, in *Generations* beauty is defined in terms of thinness, light complexion and long, fine-textured hair; most black African women characters have these beauty features in this particular soapie.

## REASONS FOR CHOOSING THE TOPIC

There are a number of reasons why I chose this topic. Research has shown that women are the main viewers of soapies. Hollows (2000) mentions that more women watch soapies as soapies appeal to women because they encourage the use of feminine skills and are told from a woman's point of view. Furthermore, Wykes (2005) points out that media representation matters because they are not a truthful reflection of real lives but a symbolic account of what is valued and approved of in that which appears to be fact.

My main reason for choosing this topic was to find out if the women characters in the soapie *Generations* did justice in their representation of black African women in general. My intention was to find out if the manner in which their bodies are constructed is a true reflection of black African womens' bodies as laid out by the philosophers who studied the body. I intended finding out if the women characters body sizes, body language and the manner in which they adorn their bodies is in line with what is defined as African.

Dow, (2006) says black female representation in the media determines how blackness and black people are seen and how other people respond to them based on the constructed images. Dow (ibid) further says that television producers depict Black female image any how they like and reach a larger viewing audience in the process. According to Dow these images in turn distort

the manner in which women view themselves; hence my interest taken in the depictions of gender because of the inherent social implications.

Furthermore, the media, is now spotlighting more women of African descent as beautiful and represents them any how they want (Sekayi, 2003). Soapies, can play a huge role in changing the manner in which society as a whole views women. The third reason is that existing research paid much attention to roles given to women and the influence that soapies have on women. However, research indicates that the media has since moved away from allocating stereotypical feminine roles to women; this therefore means new research opportunities. Very little attention however, has been given to the manner in which the women characters' bodies are constructed hence my interest in the topic.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

By embarking on this study I set out ;

- To find out if women characters in the soapie *Generations* reflect the characteristics of black African women.

- To find out if there is a culture that influences the manner in which the women characters are represented.

- To find out the unlimited possibilities that exist in the representation of the female body.

- To find out the benefit of many if any in that kind of representation.

**RESEARCH PROBLEMS: KEY QUESTIONS TO BE ASKED**

This study sought to find answers to the following problems:

- How are black women represented in the soapie *Generations*?

- What is the dominant culture in this representation?

- What are the represented possibilities and limitations of the Black women's bodies?

- Do men have a role in this representation?

## RESEARCH PROBLEMS: BROADER ISSUES TO BE INVESTIGATED

- What do the various constructions of Black women's bodies in *Generations* represent?

- Which culture informs this representation?

- What modifications (if any) are done on Black women's bodies in order to enhance the way they look and present a particular image that is in line with a particular culture?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is qualitative-based kind of research and the study was largely informed by Henning and van Jansen's (2004) definition and approach to qualitative research. For these South African authors qualitative research involves the kind of study where variables are not controlled; it is this freedom and natural development and representation that I wished to capture. Literature and the data collected was used as evidence on which I based explanations for the phenomenon being studied.

In this study I also aimed for depth rather than quantity of understanding. I have employed a research approach propagated by (Henning and van Jansen, 2004) known as 'critical framework paradigm'. Research adopting this paradigm aims at promoting critical consciousness and breaking down the

institutional structures and arrangements that reproduce oppressive ideologies, and the social inequalities that are produced, maintained and reproduced by these social structures and ideologies (ibid).

For a period of six months, from May to October 2008 I watched and recorded episodes of the soapie *Generations*. One hundred and twenty episodes were recorded. Out of a hundred and twenty episodes recorded, only ninety were analysed. The first thirty were viewed with an aim of getting a better understanding of the soapie as a whole. My main focus was on the various constructions of Black women's bodies, the underlying culture, modifications to the bodies and, above all, the benefit of men in all of this.

To enhance my understanding of the 'bodies', I further studied the characters' non-verbal gestures as well as all items that adorned their bodies. The recorded episodes were then critically analysed guided by the above-listed broad questions and key questions.

**DEFINITION OF MAIN TERMS USED IN THE STUDY**

**THE BODY**

This section focuses on definition as well as a discussion on the main terms of the study. The terms that are being defined are the body, women and soapies. The reasons for this lengthy discussion was to get the different perspectives from various philosophers about their understanding of the terms in question. Secondly, it was necessary to lay a foundation for the ensuing discussion and give the reader a clear understanding of the key words around which the study is centred.

Foucault is the philosopher behind the theory about the body. He laid a solid foundation for philosophers like Thornham and Authors who regard the body as a social construction. Their views on what social aspects influence the situation within which the body finds itself are largely based on Foucault's ground work. Even though I will look at the opinions of other philosophers, my study is mainly influenced by Foucault's and Shilling's ideas.

The woman's body is the contested ideological battleground, overburdened and saturated with meaning (Samuelson, 2007), hence the different meanings of the term bodies, women's bodies in particular. Mac Donald, (1995) defined the body as historically being much more integral to the formation of identity

for women. The body's traditional centrality to feminine identity can be divided into a variety of codes of appearance: the ideal body shape and size, appropriate forms of makeup and cosmetic care of the skin and hair, and lastly, the adornment of the body through clothes and accessories.

Wykes (2005) analysed the body in terms of the build and came up with the following three types, namely, the ectomorphic (thin build), the endomorphic (fat build), and the mesomorphic (muscular build). The ectomorphic type is characterized as being nervous, submissive and socially withdrawn. The endomorphic is characterized as socially aggressive, lazy and unattractive. Lastly, the mesomorphic type is associated with strength, happiness and dominance. According to Wykes (2005) the significance of the body shape resides in its influence upon the way other people judge our attractiveness, but also in relation to the way people perceive ourselves.

For Foucault, the body is figured as a surface and scene of cultural inscription: in other words, the body is an inscribed surface of events. He further defines it as a passive medium that is signified by an inscription from a cultural source figured as external to the body (Salih, 2004). This explains why Foucault, cited by Thornham (2000), further insists that there is no aunthentic body outside of history for bodies are produced within and by history. In other words, bodies are not biological essences, but are culturally constructed (Ramazanoglu,

1993). Authurs (1999) resonates this idea by pointing out that there can be no such thing as a natural body.

However, there are shortfalls to Foucault's work as he is biased towards men in his description of bodies which therefore means that the specificity of the disciplinary and supervisory controls applied to women's bodies and pleasures by a patriarchal society are rendered invisible (Thornham, 2000).

Thornham, (2000), also one of Foucault's scholars, resonates Foucault's ideas of the social construction and the docility of bodies when he says that there is a body that exists which is a medium which must be destroyed and transfigured in order for cultural inscriptions to emerge. Authurs (1999), points out that the motive behind the destruction and transfiguring of bodies is to defy the historicity, mortality as well as materiality of bodies.

Goffman's (1971) definition of the body differs from Foucault's. Unlike Foucault, Goffman does not see the body as produced by social forces. Goffman (1971) believes that the meanings attributed to the body are determined by shared vocabularies of body idiom which are not under the immediate control of the individuals. Goffman (1971) emphasizes that the body is integral to human agency. Goffman (ibid) is more interested in how the body enables people to intervene and make a difference to the flow of daily life (Shilling, 1993 ).

To Goffman (1971) the body is the material property of individuals. By this he means that individuals have the ability to control and monitor their bodily performances in order to facilitate social interaction. Here the body is viewed as a resource which both requires and enables people to manage their movements and appearances.

Harper (2005), defines the body as both the site and language through which positioning is negotiated. This she justifies by saying that the body can be unproblematically read for specific information pertaining to race, sexual orientation, sex/gender, age, degree of health and class location. Featherstone (1991), concurs with this point as he states that the body is an important surface on which marks of social status, family position, tribal affiliation, age, gender and religious condition can easily and publicly be displayed.

Moi (2005) however, disagrees with this view as he says to assume that one can judge the health status of a person by mere looking at the body surface is wrong. Salih (2004) concurs with Moi (2005) as, according to Salih (ibid), nothing in a human being, not even his or her body, is sufficiently stable to serve as the basis for self recognition or for understanding other human beings. Cameron, (1981) also affirms this statement by claiming that the body's meaning is invisible, not separate, from the body, and simultaneously not equivalent to it.

According to Grosz, (1994) human beings never simply have a body, but rather the body is always necessarily the object and subject of attitudes and judgements. It is physically invested, never a matter if indifference. Most human beings love their bodies. The body never has merely instrumental or ulitarian value for the subject (Grosz, 1994). According to Grosz, bodies are either male or female and she also insists that there is no consistent distinction between body and mind, and that our embodiment itself is adequate to explain our subjectivity (Connell, 2002).

de Beauvoir (1990) defined the female body as a trap, a site where patriarchy was erected, an obstacle to be overcome, a limiting burden whose transidence was a prerequisite for accession into the rational or public sphere. de Beauvoir as cited by Grosz, (1994) further defines the female body as an absorption, suction, humus, pitch, glue, a passive influx, insinuating and viscous. This according to de Beauvoir, is not only how men see the female body but it is how women vaguely feel themselves to be.

de Beauvoir, as cited by Moi (2005), further mentions that the body is not a thing but a situation, by this she meant that the body in the world that we are in; is an embodied intentional relationship to the world. The body places us in many other situations. Our subjectivity is embodied, but our bodies do not only bear the mark of sex. For de Beauvoir, the female body ought to be the

situation and instrumentality of women's freedom not a defining and limiting essence.

Shilling (1993) defines the body as a phenomenon of options and choices, highly malleable with the potential of being invested with various and changing forms of power. By this Shilling meant that the potential for people to control and to have their bodies controlled by others has advanced. Ballantyne (2005) concurs with Shilling's idea because to him the body has been and remains a zone of management, containment and conformity.

The possibilities of the body that Shilling was referring to, are biological reproduction, genetic engineering, plastic surgery and sports science. Shilling criticises science for destabilizing the knowledge of what bodies are. He wonders how far science should be allowed to reconstruct the body. Shilling blames this on the influence of the affluent west in our lives as the west has a tendency to view the body as an entity which is in the process of becoming a project which should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self identity (Shilling, 1993)

According to Ramazanoglu (1993, bodies are affected, altered and tattooed by historical circumstances, and they are indistinguishable from these effects, alterations and tattoos. Butler (1977) on the other hand sees the body as not a mere positive datum, but the repository or a site of an incorporated history. She sees the body as a mute facticity, anticipating some meaning that can be attributed only to a transcendent consciousness, understood in Cartesian terms as radically immaterial.

Thornham (2000) defines the female body as something that has to be reclaimed and retrieved as the female body is subjugated and coerced by the media. Thornham believes that once the authentic female body has been reclaimed it will in turn find self expression: in action, sexuality, display and play.

As much as it is possible to mould and modify bodies, they too have limitations. Both Shilling (1993) and Ballantyne (2005) acknowledge that the body can be managed and regulated but they also acknowledge the resistance that bodies show when refusing to be conforming to expectations. According to Shilling, bodies also age and decay, and the inescapable reality of death appears particularly disturbing to modern people who are concerned with self identity. Shilling further mentions that bodies may break down and become ill as a result of the modes of control imposed on it by society.

Connell (2002) also objects to the issue of docility of the bodies. According to Connell (ibid), bodies participate in discipline regimes because they are active not because they are docile. Bodies seek pleasure, experience and transformation. Connell further mentions that to assume that modifying bodies is easy is not true; bodies can be recalcitrant and difficult. Connell (2002) further mentions the body's growth, ageing, sickness, forgetfulness of skills and giving birth as its limitations.

According to Connell (2002) not all bodies are docile; for an example the anorexic body is a point of contradiction and struggle: like the body of a hysteric, it does not embody a feminine shame over bodily needs and appetites; it is also an embodiment of a quite unfeminine desire for self control and self mastery. The anorexic refuses to be soft, compliant, or passive (Brown, 1994). This could be the anorexic's way of exercising rigid self control.

Having given the different explanations of the body by different philosophers, it is important that I explain how the concept of the body is used in this study. In this study the female body in particular is used to highlight how the media uses different constructions of womens' bodies to convey a particular message to society at large about women and to convince women that the ideal body is the one that they see on television, which could be very impossible to achieve to other women.

The reason why the ideal body shown on television could be impossible to achieve is that some of the soapie characters bodies are computer manipulated and made to look even better and younger than they actually are.

Furthermore, what the soapie producers do not inform viewers about is that some characters go for cosmetic surgery to enhance their looks which is an option not affordable to an average women viewer. This then sometimes leads to women viewers developing a sense of inferiority about the way they look because they compare themselves to the soapie characters and end up fighting the unending battle of trying to achieve the unobtainable body they see on television.

**SOAPIES**

Soapies are defined differently by different people. Most definitions do not seem to regard soapies as a genre that deserves recognition and the status accorded to other television dramas.

Dow, (2000) defines soapies as a feminine genre, which originated in the 1930s. The reason why soapies are regarded as feminine genre is because more women watch soapies as soapies appeal to women as they are told from a woman's point of view and they also encourage the use of feminine skills (Hollows, 2000). Allen (1985), associates women's attraction to soapies with the lack of the following aspects in their lives:

- Psychological lack of advice.

- A social or emotional lack.

- Educational deprivation.

- The inability to enjoy other types of programming.

Soapies inherited this name from the fact that at some point they stood out as an undisguised soap advertisement (Brown, 1994) as they were a genre of radio entertainment used to sell soap to housewives. It was only in the 1980s that the soapies were taken seriously (Geraghty, 1991). Now that soapies are

considered as an important genre, they are seen as giving women their voice (Brown, 1994).

According to Matelski, (1988) soapies draw their story lines from fundamental human traits. Societal concerns: even though they are not discussed in an indepth continuing manner, romance, jobs, illnesses, political issues and economic climate have some influence on plot lines. Economic factors however, such as prime television, film industry and television rating structures seem even more powerful in dictating the way daytime serial plotlines are written. If topics are unpopular they are usually dropped within a few weeks and never re-introduced (Matelski, 1988).

Soapies can run forever and their lack of resolution can make them aimless and repetitious (Geraghty, 1991). The manner in which the problem of repetition can be handled is to make it enjoyable and to give the audience a sense of familiarity with the setting and characters so that to return to them is pleasurable (Geraghty, 1991). That gives the viewers stability which is somewhat rare on television as soapies do not try to change the viewers' attitudes; instead they offer a reassurance that the world is not changing as it seems (Geraghty, 1991).

Characterisation is the main component of audience interest in the soapie and characters are always archetypal, e.g. decent husband, good woman, the villain, the bitch etc. (Geraghty, 1991). These characters are then represented as the good and the bad. The ones portrayed as good are interested in sex which leads to pregnancy as it is said that babies are necessary focal point in soapies. This is done with an intention to make women identify with the characters as research has shown that the majority of women watch soapies and that while a higher proportion of that audience come from the lower end of the economic and educational scale, large numbers of upscale women also watched.

The characters portrayed as bad are more interested in sex than love. They are anti babies. They are career-oriented and they let nothing stand on their way. However, no character can be content for very long, so it also can be said that misery and despair are temporary states in a character's soap opera life (Matelski, 1988).

Soapies serve as transmitters of values and moulders of behaviour. This assumption is based on the fact that soap opera characters are seen as people who are real to the viewer. Once a soap opera has become established, its audience is remarkably loyal. In soapies advertisers and broadcasters have

found the ideal vehicle for the reinforcement of advertising impressions and the best means yet devised for assuring regular viewing.

According to Brown (1994) the soapie fan is still regarded as the other, inferior to more prestigious audiences, morally questionable, an enthusiastic consumer of laundry detergents, dishwashing liquids, bath soaps, sanitary napkins, douches, hair colouring agents, denture cleaners and bladder control products advertised on television. Viewers understand that the choice of soapies as their television genre is not a socially valued-act, yet they continue to watch and talk about them partly because it is a communal activity.

It is something that women share among themselves. It gives them something to talk about, and they do this in the same way as men (and sometimes women) talk about sports. Both groups predict the future behaviour based on past performances that make up the team or show. They pick favourites and take pleasure in knowing as much as possible about each other character (Brown, 1994).

In this study the soapie *Generations* is used to examine the manner in which the media constructs womens' bodies to convey a particular message to the public.

**WOMAN**

The term "woman" does not have a static or fixed meaning (Moi, 2005). Butler (1990) resonates this view by claiming that the subject "woman" is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms. There is a great deal of material that not only questions the viability of the subject as the ultimate candidate for representation, or indeed liberation, but there is very little agreement on what it is that constitutes, or ought to constitute, the category of women (Butler, 1994)

The different ideologies that define women are produced socially, psychologically and culturally by the people living in and creating their social, cultural and psychological worlds (Hekman, 1994). According to Hekman (1994), all cultures place a lower value on women than men. Schwarzer (1984), concurs with this view as she says that culture, civilisation and universal values have all been created by men because men represent universality. As a result, women have historically been excluded from defining how they should talk or be talked about (Mac Donald, 1995).

According to Weatherall (2002), men have manipulated every aspect of language so that it reflects men's power and social advantage and reflect women's relative lack of power and their social disadvantage. This is because of their dominance men are regarded as creators of meaning (Hekman, 1994)

hence the lack of positive adjectives that define woman. Butler (1993) also cites the power of language at work on bodies as both the cause of sexual oppression and beyond oppression.

To support this view, Crowley (1992) further states that there are no words that describe a strong independent woman although there are hundreds which refer to women in sexually derisory ways. Spender (1980) in her book *Man made Language* has drawn attention to the wealth of derogatory terms to refer to women, their bodies, and in particular their genitalia. This situation is, exactly the reverse for men, so much so that the term man itself signifies strength and independence.

This is what Spender (1980) defines as a situation where woman find themselves defining themselves through a negative medium of a language which inferiorizes them. Within a language that is pervasively masculinist,-a phallogocentric language-women constitute the unrepresentable. In other words, women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absency and opacity (Butler, 1990)

This imbalance does not have a biological origin; it is derived from cultural factors. An important symbolic component of patriarchy is always associating women with nature and men with culture because culture is ranked above the realm of the physical world (Hekman, 1994.

Discourses of embodiment mark woman as an encumbered self, identified almost entirely by the social roles concomitant with her biological destiny, affiliated physically, socially and psychologically in relationships to others. Her individuality is sacrificed to the constitutive definitions of her identity as a member of a family, as someone's daughter, mother and wife. The unified self disperses, radiating outward until its fragments dissipate altogether into social and communal masks.

Thus women's destiny cannot be self determined and her agency cannot be exercised (Smith, 1993). In supporting this view Hekman (1994) also defines women as commodities that could be exchanged between families as it is more likely for a woman to belong to more than one household/family in her lifetime.

Lacan (1982) is one of the scholars of language highly informed by Freudian theory. Lacan (ibid) does exactly what was described by Spender (1980) in his study of the dominance of men in language in that he defines woman in opposition to what men are. According to Lacan (1982), men are bearers of

phallic power. According to Lacan, (1982) this makes men over-confident and they tend to view women as the other because women lack the phallic sign. de Beauvoir (1984 ) is very critical of the view that the woman is the other.

In this context, being the phallus and having the phallus denotes divergent sexual positions within a language. To be the phallus is to be the signifier of the desire of the other and to appear as this signifier. In other words it is to be the object, the other of a heterosexualized masculine desire, but also to reflect that desire. For women to be the phallus is to signify that power, to 'embody' the phallus, to signify the site to which it penetrates and to signify the phallus through being its other, its absence, its lack, the dialectical confirmation of its identity (Lacan, 1982).

By claiming that the other that lacks the phallus is the one who is the phallus, Lacan (1982) clearly suggests that power is wielded by this feminine position of not having so the masculine subject, who has the phallus, requires this other to confirm and, hence, be the phallus, in its extended sense. According to Lacan, (1982) there is an interdependence between the two.

According to Lacan (1982) if women were to withdraw the power contained in them, i.e. the power to represent reality for men, the foundational illusions of the masculine subject would be broken up. For Lacan (ibid) woman is a symptom of man, the symptom of male neurosis, a linguistic projection of

men's own concealed loss and lack. In his hostile definition, Lacan (ibid) sees woman as having no existence within and outside language as she exists only in relation to men.

In other words there are no specific words created specifically for her, she will be defined only by what man is not. Crowley (1992) points out that woman have always been associated with the negative. If man is strong woman is weak.

de Beauvoir (1984) views the term "woman" as very complex and difficult to define with one word. de Beauvoir believes that one is not born but becomes a woman. According to her, biological facts alone do not define a woman, the body alone does not define a woman. She cites the body as one of the necessary parts of the definition of a woman but this is not sufficient (Moi, 2005).

Butler (1990) further explains what de Beauvoir (1984) meant by saying phrase that one is not born but becomes a woman. According to Butler, this means that the category of women is a variable cultural accomplishment, a set of meanings that are taken on or taken up within a cultural field, and that no one is born with a gender. Gender is always acquired. Witting cited by Butler (1990) concurs that one is not born but becomes a woman and says instead of becoming a woman one can choose to become a lesbian.

On the other hand de Beauvoir (1984) was willing to affirm that one is not born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are co-extensive and simultaneous; sex is an analytical attribute of the human, there is no human who is not sexed-sex qualifies the human as a necessary attribute. But, sex does not cause gender, and gender cannot be understood to reflect or express sex.

For de Beauvoir (1984), a woman defines herself through the way she lives her embodied situation in the world, and through the way in which she makes something of what the world makes of her. The process of making and being made is open-ended, i.e. it only ends with death (Moi, 2005). For her, a woman is someone with a female body from the beginning to the end, from the moment she is born until the moment she dies, but that body is her situation, not her destiny.

de Beauvoir (1984) also defines woman as an inferior caste. She defines a caste as a group one is born into and can not move out of. In this context she meant that if one is a woman you can never be a man. She further claims that some women's movements define woman as a class outside the existing class. They base this on the fact that housework, which has no exchange value, is done exclusively by women for nothing. Crowley, (1992) also agrees with this view by claiming that women have consistently signified inferiority.

Briefly, de Beauvoir's (1984) view point is that the study of concrete cases, i.e. lived experiences of woman are the ones that can tell what it means to be a woman in a given context. This view is in line with the poststructuralists view when they describe the body as a social, historical phenomenon. For Beauvoir it is impossible to derive the definition of woman from social norms alone just as it is difficult to derive meaning on account of biological facts alone.

For Butler (1990) the term "woman" fails to be exhaustive, not because a pre-gendered person transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities.

For Butler and her followers, the word woman will always be associated with being victims of patriarchy. Furthermore, she believes women must be deconstructed. Butler, (1993) concurs with de Beauvoir's definition of the term "woman" in her description of woman as a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. She further says that the term "woman" is open to intervention and resignification.

Briefly, Butler asserts that a woman is gender. Gender is simply an effect of an oppressive social power structure. Unlike de Beauvoir, Butler's definition of woman does not encompass the concrete, historical and experiencing body (Moi, 2005)

Grosz (1994) points out that women are always defined as weak and incapable of men's achievements. It was negative statements like these that prompted Sojourner Truth, a slave activist woman, to deliver a speech against the description of women as a fragile species. Her intention was to prove that women are strong in their own way; the fact that their strength is manifested in a manner that is different to that of man does not make it any less or insignificant (Crowley, 1992).

Truth criticized male attitudes that depicted women as fragile and helpless. She cites her own harsh lived experiences as evidence that proved that she her and other women displayed strength and resilience rather than fragility.

In her speech, Truth highlighted the difference between white and black woman (Crowley, 1992). Hekman (1994) reiterates the fact that women are not a homogenous group and that they also do not speak with one voice. According to Butler (1990) feminisms have always encountered a political problem because of their assumption that the term "women" denotes a common identity. Women on different sides of global processes have

significantly different interests, experiences and visions: most crucially women oppressed and exploited by racism (Crowley, 1992).

Black women alone do not comprise a hermetically-sealed or homogenous group. The meaning of Black women alone varies between contexts; it is also contested within a context. It is used to refer to people of African and Asian descent (Crowley, 1992). Women vary by social class (past and present), by where they live, where they were born, what language they speak, what culture they are comfortable with, what religion and politics they practice and what their sexual preferences and sexual experiences are (Lorber, 1991).

Differences between white and black women extend as far as their different views on weight issues and beauty standards as well as economic issues (De Casanova, 2004). Mac Donald (1995) extends the list of differences even further by including educational background, sexuality, temparaments, social needs, outlooks, aspirations, ethnicity as well as nationality.

Ribane (2006) also cites beauty standards, ways of worshipping as well as dress codes as the main differences between black and white women. Sharp (undated) says that black women are further separated from white woman by the fact that Black women have an image problem. It's been usurped, manipulated, degraded and turned back against her.

Meyers (1997) cites the differences in priorities between black and white women which are related to class and race. Meyers (ibid) further points out that the Black women's energy output is more often directed towards basic survival issues, as black women are faced with issues of welfare, hunger, poor housing, limited health care and transportation. Furthermore, black women have to face economic exploitation at the work place (Meyers, 1997). On the other hand, while the white woman's energy output is more often aimed at fulfilment, race and class are more significant causative factors in black women's impoverishment.

If acknowledged, these differences, according to (Bonnie, 2006) can strengthen the possibilities for solidarity among feminists and women at large. Butler (1990) wonders if there is some commonality among women that pre exists their oppression, or do women have a bond by virtue of their oppression alone? She also wonders whether there is specificity to women's cultures that is independent of their subordination by hegemonic, masculinist cultures. Mac Donald and Meyer have answers to Butler's question. Mac Donald (1995) and Meyers (1997) point out that the only common aspect among women is their relative lack of power of over men.

Phillips, in the *Polity Reader* (1994), mentions the need for improved access to every sphere as the only common ground among women. Bonnie (2006) insists that similarities among women can foster connections among themselves and shape cultural identities that bind people together and come to constitute culture.

In this study I use the term woman to refer to both singular and plural and do so interchangeable as it is womens' bodies in general and specific women as individuals that are being studied with the intention of finding out if the media represents them in a fair and dignified manner.

# CHAPTER 2

## THE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE MEDIA

The representation of women in the media has previously received a lot of attention. Different aspects of representation of women in general were studied. Findings from the studies done previously have found that the media has underrepresented, objectified and represented women in a stereotypical manner. Further research however indicates that the media has moved away from underrepresentation of women. Over-representation or equal representation to men does not necessarily mean correct representation. The following are the findings from the studies conducted before mine that I could access. These looked at the media and representation of women.

Tager (1995) looked at the correlation between the fictional world of the Soapie, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and true experiences of a Black urban viewer. Her focus was on Black viewers in general, regardless of gender. She wanted to establish the reason why people from an Afrocentric background are so taken with an American programme which has an almost exclusively White cast.

Khan (1999) looked at the portrayal of women of colour in the soapie *Egoli*. Khan was looking at women of colour in general i.e. Indians, Blacks and Coloureds. She says previously women of colour were given stereotypically unimportant roles but she found that because of globalisation there has been a change. Women of colour now feature in soapies, *Egoli* in particular gives these women prominent roles.

Dentlinger (2000) analysed the soapie *Generations* in an attempt to identify specific ways in which the Soapie sought to forge a South African identity and in doing so flag our nationhood as South Africans. According to Dentlinger, *Generations* is a true reflection of the diversity and identities we have in South Africa. I, however, disagree with Dentingler as my hypothesis is that *Generations* is not a true reflection of the diverse South African cultures or identities.

Even though Dentlingler (2000) did not look at women in particular, I will use his work as my point of departure because in my analysis of the representation of women's bodies, I have, amongst other things, focused on the failure/success of the soapie to take into account the diverse groups of women in its construction of women's bodies.

Brown (2000) looked at the representation of women in soapies in Brazil. Her main focus was on the viewers rather than the characters. As soapies are daytime entertainment, the majority of the viewers were "slave women" who worked as housekeepers for "white madams". This was due to the fact that the majority of the employers were at work and could not themselves watch television during the day. Brown noted that even though the majority of viewers were "slave women", they did not feature in the cast.

According to Brown (2000) what attracted the domestic workers to the Brazillian soapies was the manner in which the relationship between the "madam" and the maid was portrayed. Brown (2000) also looked at the manner in which poor women used their bodies while entertaining themselves with soapies. They watched with their eyes while using their hands to either get their children dressed or cleaned up. These women were found to be very good at multi-tasking. They used their bodies to do house chores and took care of their children while watching the soapies (Brown, 2000).

Brown (2000) also noted that the majority of the viewers were maids who were descendents of slaves and were enslaved themselves. Brown (ibid) describes this chain of slavery as meaning using their bodies to clean, cook and do housework for other women and their own husbands for the rest of their lives.

According to Smith (1993) women's bodies are aligned socially within the matrix of reproduction and nurturing. Brown (2000) found that that was still the case among these Brazilian "slave women". They were held subjective by their husbands who used their ability to bear children as the oppressive instrument by which they ensured control over their wives bodies and by refusing to grant them permission to use birth control.

In 2005 Wood-Hunter studied the influence of the media that is aimed at women in fashion magazines, advertising and visual story telling) in relation to women's perception of their bodies and sexuality. According to Wood-Hunter (ibid), women are victims of magazines that perpetuate patriarchy and capitalism.

According to Wood-Hunter (2005) the images in women's magazines represent a war to reassert men's control over women, their bodies, sexuality and freedom. Wood-Hunters' study revealed that women who read magazines and women who watch soapies have a high sense of dissatisfaction with their bodies (Wykes, 2005). This is sometimes complicated even further when body dissatisfaction leads to eating disorders.

According to Wood-Hunter (2005), patriarchy and capitalism are intertwined. She also established that since we live in a patriarchal society, men in one way or another, have control over women's bodies. Most advertisers are men that are taking advantage of women's vulnerability regarding their bodies. Advertisers advertise with the male as an ultimate consumer in mind. They urge women to buy products that will make them attractive commodities to male buyers, i.e. their husbands or boyfriends.

Women fall prey to these advertisements with the hope of achieving unobtainable, computer-manipulated body images they see in the media. When women realise that they can't reach the internalized ideal standard of beauty they feel inferior, which in turn promotes male dominance over their bodies. By imposing a false standard of what is and what is not desirable , mass media representations of femininity, and especially the female body, not only set limits and controls on women's self worth and the value assigned to them, but they nurture falsities by allying sexual and social success to size (Wykes, 2005).

In 2007, Samuelson analysed three novels that talked about three well-known South African women and the important role played by their bodies during the era of transition. The women whose bodies Samuelson (2007) analysed were Sarah Baartman, Madikizela-Mandela and Krotoa-Eva. According to Samuelson

(2007) these women's bodies symbolise the transition from the post apartheid era in South Africa to the new nation, which is the new South Africa. Samuelson (ibid) analysed the different roles played by these women's bodies and the suffering they had to endure during the transition process.

Samuelson (2007) describes these women's bodies as sites through which national identity was negotiated and through which unity was forged. She further defines them as figures of liminality and incorporation, as symbolic threshold figures through whom the transition was negotiated.

The first woman whose body is analysed as an important part of this nation's history is Sarah Baartman. Sarah was a Khoisan woman who was lured into going abroad by a white man by the name of Hendrik Cezar and his travelling companion Alexander Dunlop, a surgeon of a merchant ship and exporter of museum specimens from the Cape (Gordon-Chipembere, 2006). These men promised Baartman a better life but ended up using her body as a site for both male gaze and sexual gratification.

Gordon-Chipembere (2006) in *Agenda* also wrote an article about Baartman's body. She resonates Samuelson's (2006) account of Baartman's humiliating experiences. According to Gordon-Chipembere, Baartman was led and exhibited as a wild beast by her keeper. Her body could be viewed by the British public for two shillings. White male Europeans were fascinated by her

genitals and buttocks. Her body was made to stand as an icon of racial or sexual difference (Gordon-Chipembere, 2006).

Throughout her life abroad, Baartman's lived body was objectified in various ways. Both Samuelson and Gordon-Chipembere agree that Baartman's body was dismembered. Her private parts were fragmented from her whole body and they were used to define her. Defining Baartman through her body was done to justify the fact that they treated her as a commodity. Gordon Chipembere (2006) further states that Baartmans' body represented sexualised Black femininity.

Baartman's lasciviousness and hypersexuality were inscribed on her body in the form of excessively proportioned genitalia and buttocks (Authurs, 1999). Her lived body was seen as a site over which Europeans articulated their difference from Africans, and also as a tool through which the Whites created their own racial supremacy (Magwaza, 2006). Her death was mysterious but her dead body was returned to South Africa as an instrument through which transition between the two continents was negotiated.

Sangweni, a South African journalist quoted by Gordon-Cipembere (2006), spent her teen years in the USA. She says she could identify with what Baartman went through when she herself was abroad.

As Baartman became a pre-eminent example of racial and sexual alterity because of her ridiculed and pathologised buttocks, Sangweni was also constantly ridiculed and made to feel ashamed of her hips and round buttocks (Gordon-Chipembere, 2006). It was only when she got home that Sangweni discovered her body and found identity. She was quoted by Gordno-Chipembere (2006) as saying:

'It was freedom to be with African women who had the same shape as I did.

My body became my link to South Africa, to home, to a place that I did not

feel ashamed of my body.'

Samuelson also analysed Madikizela Mandela's body. Madikizela is defined by Samuelson (2007) as a political widow, a woman in waiting. Madikizela-Mandela was expected to suppress her sexual needs while faithfully waiting for her husband with whom she had very little chances of reuniting as he was imprisoned. Connell, (2002) mentions that women are always supposed to be sexually loyal to their partners; Madikizela-Mandela was also supposed to save her body for her husband. Her failure to wait was defined as a weakness on her

part. She was judged as a failure who failed the nation, regardless of the number of years they spent apart (Samuelson, 2007)

When her husband eventually came home, Madikizela-Mandela withheld her body from her husband. In other words she was not willing to sexually engage herself with a man that was a stranger to her even though they were legally married. The whole nation was so concerned about Mandela's happiness that no one wondered if she was still prepared to get into bed with a stranger from whom she had been separated for many years. Her feelings and emotions did not matter.

The South African nation expected her to recreate and rekindle her marriage by restoring intimacy through giving her body to her husband. Because of her failure to do that, she was seen as a failure and blamed by the whole nation for their divorce (Samuelson, 2007).

The last woman is Krotoa-Eva, whose real name was Krotoa. She was renamed Eva by the Europeans on their arrival at the Cape, hence the name Krotoa-Eva. She is defined as the first female cultural broker. She was a translator between the Khoisan and the Dutch and was also the first indigene to marry a European. This woman's body was also dismembered by the Europeans.

The important parts of her body were her tongue and her womb. Her tongue contributed to nation building through her facilitation of cultural exchange and linguistic transmission. Her womb symbolised first genetic transmission between the two races through the birth of her children (Samuelson, 2007).

In her analysis, Samuelson (2007) believes that the South African nation is what it is today because of the roles played by women through their bodies yet she feels that even though women played an important role, their input is now forgotten by the very nation on whose behalf they suffered.

In the literature that I have studied, very little attention has been given to the body. Brown (2002) did look at the bodies of the viewers and how they were used, however; her work was based in Brazil and was an audience ethnography rather than a textual analysis of women characters in the soapie.

Samuelson (2007) studied the role played by women's bodies during the transition period. She analyzed the manner in which real-life women were portrayed in a novel. Wood-Hunter (2005) also looked at the representation of women's bodies in women's magazines. In the literature I have managed to access no one focused on the representation of women's bodies in the soapies.

Brown studied the soapies but her focus was on viewers more than the soapie characters.   The literature on women and soapies has focused on roles portrayed by women, race and sometimes embodiment but not the three put together in the South African context.

**CHAPTER 3**

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**INTRODUCTION**

This study is grounded in the three following theories, i.e. representation and stereotyping, scopophillia and social constructionism. The use of representation was motivated by the fact that in this study I am looking at the manner in which black African women characters are represented in the soapie *Generations;* representation was therefore one of the most relevant theories on which I could base my study.

Stereotyping was chosen because part of my aim in this study is to find out if the soapie *Generations* is not in any way representing women in a stereotypical manner. Scopophilia was motivated by the fact that representing women in a stereotypical manner sometimes involves objectifying them. Social constructionism was chosen because the manner in which these women's bodies are portrayed are just constructions and not a true reflection of who they are. Their bodies are simply used as commodities to convey a particular message to the viewers.

**REPRESENTATION**

Butler (1993) defines representation as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend the visibility and legitimacy to women as political objects. She further defines representation as the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or distort what is assumed about the true category of women. Butler further mentions that women have always been represented in pervasive cultural condition in which women's lives have been either misrepresented or not represented at all.

For Blount (1996); representation refers to images that are selected from what we recognize as reality; they are tied to and have meaning within particular settings. Blount (1996) further states that representation is used to talk about questions of configurations, how one places black in the scene of writing, the imagination and so on. In other words, in simpler terms this means that representation is a theory that looks at the roles allocated to people in accordance with their race in plays, literature as well as in the media.

It is not common to be offered a mediated representation of the female world that shows women in their full variety, complexity and range of ability that is amazing and unimaginable. However, in many ways the limited way women are represented in the media is a salutory lesson not just on how that might

affect the way they see themselves but about how they are valued in life (Wykes, 2005).

According to Wykes (ibid), how people are seen determines in part how they are treated, how they treat others is based on how we see them; such seeing comes from representation (Dyer, 1993). It is therefore important to consider how media representation might impact on women. If women are not correctly represented in the soapie *Generations* it could have a negative impact on the manner in which people treat women in society.

## STEREOTYPING

Stereotype is a term that was invented by Lippman, a noted journalist of his day to describe a kind of behaviour (Unger, 1992). According to Unger, Lippmann defines stereotypes as mainly culturally-determined pictures that intrude on an individual's cognitive faculties and his or her perceptions of the world. Up until today stereotyping is viewed as a process that distorts the truth. Stereotypes range from religious beliefs, racial or ethnic groups as well as gender.

Stereotyping is described by Hall (1997) as a power/knowledge game. Stereotyping tends to happen where there are gross inequalities of power. It is a way of classifying people according to a norm and constructs the excluded as the other. According to Hall, stereotyping reduces people to a few simple, essential characteristics which are represented as fixed by nature. It also sets up a symbolic frontier between the normal and the deviant, acceptable and unacceptable (Hall, 1997)

Having given the two above explanations on stereotypes, I will adopt Hall's definition of stereotypes in my analysis of the representation of women's bodies. My choice is motivated by the fact that Hall defines stereotypes as a power/mind game which is motivated by gross inequalities of power. In my analysis amongst other issues, I will look at the subjectivity of women's bodies to men's. My intention is to find out if the manner in which women's bodies are represented is motivated by the desire to satisfy men's sexual desire or not. This is justified by my choice of the other theory, scopophilia, which looks at the subjection of women to male gaze and objectification.

## SCOPOPHILIA

Scopophilia is a theory from a Freudian psychoanalysis theory. According to Mulvey (1989) scopophilia entails regarding other people as objects, by subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. This approach to representation argues that one derives pleasure from using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. Scopophilia is defined as a basic human sexual drive to look at other human beings, females in particular, as objects.

In scopophilia the female character is represented as passive and powerless. She is represented as the object of desire for male characters (Smelik, 1999). MacDonald (1995) says female characters tend to be represented in a manner that emphasizes their to be looked-at-ness, which makes them an object of the dominant male gaze. According to Thornham (2000), pleasure in looking has been split between active male and passive female. MacDonald (1995) further states that to be looked at is a fate for women in Western Culture, while the act of looking is reserved for men. Novi (2002) concurs with this view by stating that the inclusion of female bodies as decorative components is common in the media.

According to Mulvey (1989) the female figure being gazed at is often styled accordingly and her appearance is coded for strong visual and erotic impact. Mulvey (1989) further highlights the fact that in the manner in which the woman is represented, she herself has not the slightest importance; what she represents counts more than she does.

This theory has been criticised by feminists because of its shortcomings. Firstly, this theory depends for its meaning on the controlling power of the male character as well as on the objectified representation of the female character. Secondly, in this theory the image of woman is fundamentally ambiguous in that it combines attraction and seduction with an evocation of castration anxiety. Thirdly, the male gaze makes no room for the female spectator nor for a female gaze yet women do go to the movies (Smelik, 1999).

## SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM

Social constructionism is an umbrella term that denotes views which suggest that the body is somehow shaped, constrained and even invented by society (Shilling, 1993). Social constructionism cautions us to be ever suspicious of our assumptions about how the world appears to be. Social constructionists take a critical stand towards the often taken-for-granted ways of understanding the world and ourselves (Burr, 1995).

Social constructionists are against the view that the body can be analysed adequately purely as a biological phenomenon. The character and meanings attributed to the body and the boundaries which exist between bodies of different groups of people are social products (Shilling, 1993).

# CHAPTER 4

## ANALYSIS OF CHARACTERS' BODIES

## INTRODUCTION

In this section I present an analysis of characters' bodies; that is, their biological make up, personal traits as well as artefacts used to adorn their bodies. I critique the manner in which the soapie *Generations* employ these variables to portray and instil a particular kind of representation of the black woman. I limit the analysis to six characters.

## BRIDGETTE

Bridgette is one of the six women characters whose bodies have been analysed. Bridgette is married to Dumisani, a marketing manager in an advertising company. According to the story line, before marrying Dumisani, Bridgette was a model. She, however, had to give up her modelling career as her husband Dumisani was earning enough to provide for her. However, Bridgette's body does not have the features of a model.

Bridgette is represented as a narcissistic type of an individual. This type of a person is excessively self conscious, chronically uneasy about her/ his health, afraid of ageing and death, constantly searching for flaws and signs of decay. She is always eager to get along with others yet unable to make real friendships. Even though narcissism has previously been viewed negatively, it is now re-evaluated as a source of feminine pleasure (Hancock, 2000).

Bridgette seems to take her body weight so seriously that she even rejects motherhood. This she mentions in the story line. She is doing what Moi (2005) and de Beauvoir (1984) suggested that women do in order to free themselves from the chains of patriarchy. de Beauvoir and Moi (ibid) both agree that motherhood is a socially-created institution regularly used to legitimaze women's oppression.

Bridgette regards her body as what Shilling (1993) calls a project. This means accepting that the body's appearance, size, shape and even its contents as open to reconstruction in line with the designs of its owner. Regarding the body as a project is a luxury accessible only to dominant classes. This involves the individuals being conscious of and actively concerned about management, maintenance and appearance of their bodies. In this context, bodies become malleable entities which can be shaped and honed by the vigilance and hard work of their owners (Shilling, 1993).

On treating the body as a project, an individual often has a choice of placing the emphasis on intrinsic functioning of the body as an organism which leads to the micribiotic cult of health or on the appearance as a perceptible confirguration, the physique (Mac Donald, 1995). Bridgette's focus is on the latter. To try and get her body in the right shape Bridgette spends most of her time exercising. According to Mac Donald (1995) exercise and fitness are implied routes to self satisfaction.

Mac Donald (1995) points out that previously beauty was attained through sleep and healthy eating, however, nowadays, it is to be actively worked for in a gym. Featherstone (1991) resonates this view when he points out that there is a new emphasis on keeping fit, the body beautiful and postponement of ageing. There is a link between beauty and health. Bridgette also goes to gym with the intention of reconstruction of her body and postponing ageing.

Mac Donald (1995) mentions that for women, ageing is constructed as a process to be feared and avoided for as long as possible, whereas for men it often enhances status and prestige. This explains why Bridgette goes all out to ensure that she prolongs her youth by ensuring that her body stays in shape (Bonnie, 2006). Bridgette is portrayed as adopting what Shilling (1993) defines as the attitudes of affluent west where the body is seen as an entity which is in the process of becoming.

Another reason that could be cited for Bridgette's obsession with a perfect body is that to many, slenderness is associated with better health, fitness and agility (Wykes, 2005). Secondly, because women have long been encouraged to view bodies as intrinsically related to their sexual desirability, sexual desirability as well as success are also seen as easily attainable by thin people (Wykes, 2005). Changing bodies is big business (capitalism) and much of it is fun (Wykes, 2005). As Featherstone (1991) says the catch phrases for today's hard-living society are: stay young, stay beautiful and live longer.

Gym scenes are increasingly portrayed and glamourized in an ever widening range of adverts (Wykes, 2005). As Bridgette goes to gym she puts on expensive accessories that have to be bought and kept up to date (Wykes, 2005). Capitalism benefits from every aspect that involves women's enhancement of the appearance of their bodies (Wood-Hunter, 2005).

At the gym Bridgette practices what Foucault, as cited by Ranibow (1984) and Connell (2002), describes as strict discipline to bodies. According to Foucault and Connell, discipline increases the forces of the body. Going to the gym alone is not enough for Bridgette; when she gets there she separates herself from the masses (Ranibow, 1984). Her exercise is not just conventional, it is technically thought out, calculated and organized (Ranibow, 1984).

She employs a personal trainer, Max, who has to ensure that her desired body's needs are analysed and attended to. Her body is manipulated and pushed to its limits to ensure that it conforms and that she achieves her ultimate goal, i.e. her desired body shape. According to Ranibow (1984), for the body to be docile, correct principles and techniques of training have to be employed. As Ranibow (1984) points out, bodies obey and respond, so does Bridgette's.

Meyers (1997) mentions dieting as one of the methods of disciplining the body. In addition to physical exercise, Bridgette also follows a very strict and healthy diet. When she is stressed out, she then binges on junk food. Shilling (1993) further points out that body construction comes with some oppressive aspects, those being the increased use of illegal drugs. In her attempts to reconstruct her body, Brigdette takes a daily tonic that is supposed to suppress her appetite and give her extra energy.

**KARABO**

Karabo's body is constructed as that of a professional woman. Bonnie (2006) points out that the dominant vision of a professional body today is aligned with our culturally-preferred and ideologically constructed meanings for a real job.

Karabo's body is portrayed as what Connell (2002) describes as an object of power; this qualifies it as a body of a true professional. Her body looks physically and emotionally fit. According to Bonnie (2006) professional women have to look physically and emotionally fit as physically unfit women are viewed as out of control and less able to endure the demands of work.

This stereotypical thinking is informed by the fact that women's bodies have for a long time been negatively defined as leaky, protruding (Bonnie, 2006) and therefore putting work at risk. To be embodied as a woman was to have a body and mind which were unable to withstand the rigours of physical and mental exertion (Shilling, 1993). To sum up: women's bodies were constructed as problematic within the traditional working paradigm.

Shilling (1993) mentions that women tend to develop their bodies as objects of perception for others; professional women find themselves having to negotiate their identities so that they are not read as unruly others or not really professional by the refined masculine subjects who rein in bodily excess and seem fit enough to perform the higher order work of the mind. Karabo in an attempt to make an impression finds herself doing what Butler (1993) defines as a performance. Although she is a woman she finds herself carrying her body in the manner that her male counterparts do to prove her competency.

Bonnie (2006) further points out that embodying professionalism means performing whiteness. According to Bonnie (ibid), white professional women treat their bodies as a text to be read by others. In her attempt to embody professionalism, Karabo does with herself what white middle class women do with their bodies. This she does by using non-verbal behaviours to display a body that is confident, not threatening, engaging, not available and feminine but not excessively so.

This method of carrying one's body is what Goffman (1971) describes as the body idiom. Goffman (1971) defines the body idiom as a conventionalized form of non-verbal communication which is by far a most important component of behaviour in public. This involves the dress code, bearing movements and position, sound level, physical gesture, such as waving or

saluting, facial decorations and broad emotional expressions. Not only do the above components of body idiom grade people hierarchically, they also display wealth and life style.

Both Bonnie (2006) and Shilling (1993) mention that professional women wear expensive clothing in order to be seen as better and more capable managers. Bonnie (ibid) further states that nowadays professional women consider their bodies as objects on display. Wolf (1991) concurs as he points out that professional women today are expected to emulate fashion models. As Karabo's body is constructed as that of a professional, her dress code is also very powerful. She is always wearing expensive suits and reading glasses.

Powerful dress codes are viewed as creating class divisions; it separates the bosses from the junior employees (Bonnie, 2006). Not only does dress represent control and dominance it also has subversive qualities (Shilling, 1993). For example, Mac Donald (1995) defines powerful dress code as a powerful weapon of control and dominance.

As a professional body, Karabo's body is always well-groomed. The kind of grooming that takes time. For example, she regularly changes her hairstyle. She has light skin and long straight hair. These, according to Bonnie (2006) are traits that continue to define any female as beautiful and desirable in the racist white imagination and in the colonized black mindset.

As Featherstone, (1991) points out, like cars and other consumer goods, bodies require servicing, regular care and attention to preserve maximum efficiency. For Karabo's body to maintain that professional look she relies on others to take care of her body. According to Bonnie, professionals have a tendency to maintain a certain distance from their bodies. In other words they let others do the touching of their body parts to enhance their looks. I therefore assume that Karabo employs the help of those that specialise in jobs that involve touching the body.

This, according to Bonnie (2006), professionals have to do because dress codes and other non-verbal markers come to represent the organization that a particular professional works for, literally and figuratively. This then puts professionals in webs of communication irrespective of that particular professional's intention (Shilling, 1993).

At home Karabo has Emily who takes care of the house and her laundry, which means her body is not for housekeeping but something more important than that. She has a hairstylist that takes care of her hair. She has a manicurist that attends to her nails. She has a thin well-toned body which indicates that she has a personal trainer to help her manage the physical appearance of her body.

The crew that maintains Karabo's body is not part of the cast. The reason could be that Karabos' job is classy whereas the work of those that maintain others professional bodies are rarely among the professional class; they are stigmatized and often looked down upon therefore not important enough to be part of the cast (Bonnie, 2006).

Karabo's professional body can also be deconstructed. Even though Karabo's body is more often constructed as professional at work, that construction is sometimes deconstructed when she is portrayed as relaxed in jeans with her sister-in-law, Queen, and her nephew, Prince, at home.

**NTOMBI**

Ntombi is constructed as a very liberated and independent woman who is not defined by her fiance's status. She is a well-established journalist and is not afraid of tackling risky assignments. Even though she comes from a royal family and is engaged to be married to a business tycoon, she believes in using her body to earn a living and her independence through work. Even though she is portrayed as feminist and a very brave one, she is always glamorous. This resonates with what de Beauvoir (1984) avers when she said one can be both beautiful and intelligent.

Ntombi's body has been constructed in a variety of ways; as Shilling (1993) points out, bodies are highly malleable phenomena which can be invested with various and changing forms of power. According to Shilling the various forms of power with which the body is invested have advanced the potential many people have to control their own bodies, and to have them controlled by others.

Ntombi is light in complexion. Shilling (1993) maintains that feminine beauty is related to light skin. Wykes (2005) mentions that parts of women's bodies such as their hips, breasts, legs and hair signify their sexuality. Hancock (2000) concurs as he points out mouth, hair and other bodily parts must all be subject to scrutiny in order to achieve the ideal feminine self.

Ntombi's lips are always very well lined and glossy which enhances her sexuality and femininity. She is always wearing professionally-applied make up on her face. This enhances her looks even more.

Lorber (1991) points out that false universalization sets up white woman as a norm against Black women. Wood-Hunter (2005) resonates this view as she says that Black South African woman are absorbing White South African attitudes of beauty towards their bodies. Ntombi's natural hair texture and colour are never shown; instead she always wears long hair extensions. Even though the extensions are black they have the characteristics of a white women's hair in terms of the texture, length and colour.

This affirms what Wykes (2005) said when he said that straight hair is associated with middle class and status. Wood-Hunter (2005) also mentioned that women are victims of capitalism and patriarchy. Ntombi's body is also commodified; it is used to represent western ideals of beauty and it is further used to convince other women that hair extensions enhance one's beauty. Women viewers will internalize this idea of beauty and thereafter feel inferior and uncomfortable with their natural hair, which could drive them to buy products to straighten their own hair or buy the extension and hide their own hair.

Even though Ntombi has lighter skin tone and a thin body, which are known to be associated with western attributes of beauty, she also has what De Casanova (2004) and Ribane (2006) describe as one of the Black women's body features, i.e. big buttocks. Ribane (2006) regards protruding posteriors as particularly sexy, hence the term sexy posterior. According to Ribane (2006), Ntombi's body structure is typically African.

Ribane (ibid) further states that to be considered desirable, an African girl needs to have that specifically-rounded African 'heritage'. This kind of body construction is what Bonnie (ibid) calls a biracial woman-an African woman adopting western ideals of beauty and being comfortable with it. According to Bonnie, the biracial woman has been and remains the standard against which other black females are measured.

Ntombi seems to fit in well in the category of a biracial woman. She has a bit of African culture, that being her light complexion, sexy lips, thin body and artificial hair. She also has a bit of western culture. This makes her fit in well in both cultures.

Liberated as she is, Ntombi could not escape what de Beauvoir (1984) calls a trap in women's lives i.e. pregnancy. Motherhood is forcing her to limit what she can do or cannot do with her body as she has to put her child first before taking any decision. Her fiancé sometimes emotionally blackmails her about neglecting her child when he wants her to put her family before her job.

Shilling (1993) mentions that the body is potentially no longer subject to the constraints and limitations that once characterized its existence. In addition to the above construction, Ntombi's body is also constructed as a mask (Shilling, 1993). This mask is a temporary construction to fulfil her boss's assignment. She lets Kenneth, her male boss, take full control of her body when he instructs her to wear a disguise in order to gain access to information that would help him (the boss) nail a druglord.

Ntombi agreed to undertake a risky assignment that was going to put herself and her family at risk. A professional was organised to her disguise her body when he went to see Kabelo, a drug dealer she and her boss wanted to nail. The masks deceives and manipulates others. The mask is often used with an intention to facilitate communication between strangers.

The disguised appearance is carefully constructed and managed by the presentationally skilled individual, projecting a range of identities to others according to the needs of the social situation. Here the body becomes a performance and is integral to the exercise of agency (Shilling, 1993).

On her first disguised visit to Kabelo, Ntombi accessorized (ibid). She put on a wig, a hat and she also adorned her body with lots of jewellery and special make up. She also put on big glasses which she doesn't normally wear. She went under a false name. She called herself Nokuthula Sibanyoni. As Connell, (2002) says that flexible as they can be, bodies sometimes refuse to be moulded. Ntombi's body also refused to be docile.

With all the disguise, Kabelo recognised Ntombi. This put Ntombi's life at risk as she had a narrow escape as she was rescued by the police when Kabelo was about to force himself on her and was also threatening to cut her throat with a knife should she not co-operate.

**SARAH**

Sarah is a middle-aged African woman who is employed as a child minder by a young engaged couple, Ntombi and Sibusiso. What Sarah is constructed as doing for a living is what Bonnie (2006) describes as over-representation of women in low wage services that lack health insurance and pension coverage. Her job description affirms what Mac Donalds (2000) calls a stereotype that is perpetuated by the media, and that is femininity is associated with caring and being content in serving the needs of others.

Her physical appearance is completely different to that of her employer, Ntombi. Her whole body reflects attributes associated with black African beauty. Her complexion is darker, she has beautiful brown skin, with no visible make up. Her dark complexion is not a coincidence; it reflects her low socio-economic status, and lack of money to buy products to reconstruct her body. She has a wide nose (Sharp, undated) and full dark lips (Ribane, 2006). She is full-figured and seems content with it. She has well-rounded hips and good firm breasts (Ribane, 2006).

Compared to her employer, Ntombi, Sarah keeps a very low profile when it comes to clothing. This is in line with what Lorber (1991) said when he stated that female employers prefer their domestic workers to dress shabbily to exaggerate their low economic inferiority. Sarah's head is always covered with a scarf (doek). The headscarf is there to emphasize Sarah's social standing, inferiority and ignorance.

Ribane, (2006) mentions that many self-respecting black women of the older generation go around covering their lovely crowning glories (hair) with a doek.

This they do, unaware that the custom originated from the missionary teaching that Christian worshippers must cover their heads as a sign of respect when going to church. This custom, according to Ribane (2006), has become so deeply embedded that black African people mistake it for a traditional practice. What the missionaries wanted to inculcate in black African women was that black African hair was something to be hidden (ibid).

This difference in dress code and body shape and size between two women (Ntombi as an employer, and Sarah as an employee) of the same race confirms what Croxlely (1992) said when he said Black women alone are not a homogenous group.

When communicating with her madam Sarah uses what Goffman (1971) describes as body idiom. This involves bearing movements and position, sound level, physical gesture such as waving or saluting, facial decorations and broad emotional expressions. Even though Sarah is older than her madam, she always rubs her hands together as a sign of respect. She also uses a very low tone in her voice. Not only do the above components of body idiom grade people hierarchically, they also display wealth and life style.

In this context the difference in body weight and dress code reflects Sarah's low income category and poverty against Ntombi's wealth and social class. Sarah exhibits a feminine, less authoritative mode of engagement with the world, one characterized as very intuitive (Smith, 1993). She can always foretell if something bad is going to happen to her employers; the problem is that she in not articulate enough for them to understand what she is trying to warn them about (Smith, 1993).

Lastly, Sarah always wears a smile on her face; this affirms what Mac Donald (1995) said when she said black women are always represented as finding satisfaction in caring and this compensates for their low social status. Even though Ntombi and Sarah are both black, they belong to different social classes

## KHETHIWE:

Khethiwe was initially constructed as a naive girl from KwaZulu-Natal. Before landing a big contract as a model, Khethiwe did stereotypically feminine jobs like catering and making name badges. Khethiwe's story line is that of rags to riches. She was identified by Dumisani, (Bridgette's husband) as a suitable model for his first major campaign, La Chocolatte.

When Dumisani identified Khethiwe, in her, he saw a legitimate site of reconstruction, an object that could be reconstructed with reconstruction products (Wykes, 2005). As Sekayi (2003) says, media has a tendency to identify women and portray them anyhow they like, Khethiwe was a case in point. After getting the contract as a model, Khethiwe's natural look was changed to be in line with her new job title. She had to drop the natural look. Her body was adorned with heavy makeup and jewellery, which enhanced her

looks. Not only did her body change, the body idiom did too and her outlook also changed completely.

The body idiom is what Goffman (1971) defines as a conventionalized form of non-verbal communication which is by far the most important component of behaviour in public. This involves the dress code, bearing movements and position, sound level, physical gesture such as waving or saluting, facial decorations and broad emotional expressions. Not only do the above components of body idiom grade people hierarchically, they also display wealth and life style.

By virtue of powers vested in him, Dumisani wanted Adam, (Khethiwe's male character model partner) in the story line to pour chocolate over her naked body, thereby making her body a site of male gaze. By signing the contract, Khethiwe put her body under subjectivity from Dumisani. She gave Dumisani a hold (Ranibow, 1984) over her body in return for money and fame.

Dumisani put pressure on Khethiwe to perform actions she felt uneasy with. Dumisani wanted to potray Khethiwe's body as an object to be viewed by male audiences as this is a key element in western culture. According to Novi (2000) the inclusion of female bodies as decorative components of advertisements is common in western culture.

At first Khethiwe was unhappy with this sensational act; she refused as she could see that her body was now used for male gaze and objectified and that was against her culture. She was also afraid of the reaction of her parents and the community in KwaZulu-Natal should they see the picture on billboards.

What Dumisani wanted to do with Khethiwe's body was to turn it into what Wykes (2005) calls a spectacle, both something to be looked at, whether real or meditated, and to be looked at in search of feminine identity. Eventually she agreed as she was promised a lot of money.

What was done to Khethiwe's body is commodification. Shilling (1993) defines commodification as the mode through which western societies seek to ensure a minimal continuity in how people present themselves. That is, the means for managing the self have become increasingly tied up with consumer goods, and the achievement of social and economic success hinges crucially on the presentation of an acceptable self image.

Khethiwe's body was reconstructed to show other woman that a make over is possible and that a make over can open up opportunities of getting yourself a rich husband that will provide for one. For example, Khethiwe was in demand since her make over. In short, what they did to Khethiwe's body was treating it as an economic asset (Bonnie, 2006).

All the soapie male characters like Dumisani and Sbusiso Dlomo started noticing how beautiful Khethiwe was even though they had lived with her for a very long time. This proves the fact that the purpose behind reconstructing Khethiwe's image was to make her more attractive to men, in other words making her beautiful for men to appreciate her.

Khaphela, her brother-in-law, with whom she had had a relationship but with no feelings of intimacy, changed his look just to get Khethiwe's attention. He was developing feelings for Khethiwe of which Khethiwe was not aware. This sudden interest displayed by men towards Khethiwe created female enmity as other women felt threatened by Khethiwe's new looks.

**QUEEN**

Queen is one of the woman characters that is employed in what Lorber (1991) classifies as work that serves men, a secretary. According to the story line Queen is one of those women that did nothing at all, she waited gracefully and passively for a man to come her way and furnish her with a destiny (Smith, 1993). Simply put, this means that Queen was just an ordinary woman doing nothing with her life until a man came by and married her and gave her a good life. That is how Queen became a Moroka (the Moroka's being a wealthy family that owns, among other assets, an advertising agency).

Queen's body is constructed to represent what (Ribane, 2006) calls acculturation. This term refers to a fusion of different cultures. According to Ribane, this is not proper fusion as one culture remains dominant over the other. In this context, acculturation is manifested as Queen's body is portrayed as representing both western as well as an African standard of beauty with the former more dominant.

Out of the six women characters being analysed, Queen is the only one who does not have the current fashion body as mentioned by Meyers (1997). Her body is not taut, she is also not narrow hipped and she is also not light skinned. Sarah, also has a full-figured body; her looks are in keeping with her job. On the other hand, Queen's socio-economic background is completely different to that of Sarah.

Ribane (2006), an African ex model, cites the following as African attributes to beauty; rounded hips, good firm breasts, round cheeks, full lips and a lovely clear skin that looks as if it has been washed with milk. Queen meets all of the above criteria. Moreover, she is not light but medium in complexion. She looks well-fed and healthy with a buxom body and shapely legs. This appearance resonates Ribane's (2006) point when she mentions that being skinny is not considered sexy in African culture. Being skinny, according to Ribane (ibid), is associated with poverty and suffering.

Queen seems comfortable with her weight, even in real life, as she was interviewed and quoted by Nonkululeko Malinga in *Agenda: Sexuality and Body Image,* (2005) P59 saying :

'I believe that I have a fabulous full figured African body. It is great when people tell me I look gorgeous, but I don't take too much notice when I am told I would look better if I was thinner. It was my decision to lose weight after my pregnancy because I felt that there was no need for me to carry around that much extra weight, and now I am happy with my body. I have researched surgical enhancement, in particular for the breast and tummy. However, it involves a risk which I am not willing to take. I am comfortable with my body, and that is expressed through the way I walk and the way I relate to people. Having good self esteem allows me to comfortably express my sexuality and femininity with my loved ones.'

Ribane (2006) and Authurs (1999) seem to differ on the extent to which beauty is catergorized. According to Ribane (2006), beauty is art, and art arises out of culture. One cannot therefore separate beauty from culture. In African culture beauty is not only determined by physical attributes. Good character has always been considered integral to the notion of beauty. According to Authurs (1999) beauty is just a physical attribute, distinct from morality or intelligence or any other quality.

Queen is constructed as very caring, and all her actions reflect the spirit of 'Ubuntu'. Furthermore, Queen is constructed as a fashion slave. Wolf (1991) criticizes this slavery as he says that it drains women economically which in turn deprives them of economic security. Hollows (2000), however, disagrees with the fact that women who fall prey to fashion are exploited. Hollows (2000) views buying of fashion and beautifying products as a celebratory, pleasurable and empowering potential of fashion.

## CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been on the representation of black African women in the soapie *Generations*. The discussion of this dissertation covered six black African women characters' bodies and the manner in which they are represented in the soapie *Generations*. The women characters' bodies have been studied as socially-constructed phenomena. The following are what I found from my analysis;

Mass media is stereotypically known for performing two tasks at once. Firstly, in their representation of women mass media reflect dominant values and attitudes in society. In other words, the media perpetuates the existing stereotypes about women in society instead of changing the negative stereotypes in particular. For an example, in the soapie *Generations* there is evidence that women are still being objectified by media.

Khethiwe's case is an example of objectification of women. Khethiwe was identified by a male character Dumisani and turned into an object of male gaze and as soon as she was not good enough for public viewing because of her scared face she was easily discarded.

As Dow (2006) puts it, female representation in the media determines how blackness and black people are seen and how other people respond to them based on constructed images. So if in *Generations,* the popular prime time soapie women are represented as objects of male gaze that could be easily discarded once made use of, men that watch the soapie can start treating their women partners likewise. As Dow (2006) puts it this can also distort the manner in which women viewers view themselves.

The second task that the media is stereotypically known for is acting as an agent of socialization (Mac Donald, 1995). As one of the agents of socialization, *Generations* seems to be doing what Yancy (2004), describes as the process of creating and producing a docile and self- hating black body. The manner in which women's bodies are constructed in the soapie *Generations* promotes a particular type of body as the ideal one.

Even though the soapie is predominantly black, it seems to import media images, leading to the valuation of whiteness as attractive and devaluation of non whiteness as unattractive. The soapie *Generations* seems to be doing what Sekayi (2003) describes as the trend in the media; that when black African women are represented they are represented in a manner suggesting that their bodies are constructed to meet western ideals of beauty in terms of body type, skin colour and hair texture.

For an example, there is a prevalence of thinness among characters. Thinness, according to Ribane (2006) and De Casanova (2004) is not an African attribute to beauty. In the soapie Generations there is a tendency to promote the perfectly honed, slim body (Authurs, 1999). Women are encouraged to remain young and youthful looking. As Sekayi (2003) puts it, the soapie *Generations* promotes the idea that the ideal body is synonymous with beauty, success, extreme concern about health and self control.

Furthermore, in the soapie *Generations* women are encouraged to work their bodies, labouring to perfect an ever increasing number of zones, mouth, hair, legs, eyes, teeth and other bodily parts; these must all be subject to scrutiny in order to achieve their idea of feminine self and by so doing seeking the approval of the male gaze (Hancock, 2000). The soapie seems to be promoting the idea of racialized beauty by linking it to economic wealth Authurs (1999).

The beauty that the women characters are portrayed to be obsessed with, is represented to be for the benefit of men. For an example all the thin and young looking women have rich handsome husbands. Queen who is not as thin as others in her league is not as lucky when it comes to finding a partner. She is forever looking for the right man. Men are stereotypically represented as the ones that bring about fulfilment in womens' lives.

In the soapie *Generations* the power of whiteness manifests itself in many forms (Yancy, 2004). The producers of Generations seem to draw their definitions of beauty from the 1960's when apartheid was still very strong. Then, the moral worth of an individual was implicated in definitions of beauty, at the same time as the norm of white skin and straight hair (Authurs, 1999).

For an example, there is not a single woman among the ones analysed that has short natural hair or have dreads on their hair. All women characters analysed have hair extensions, their natural hair is never shown, in some cases the extensions are even tinted to make them look more like that of a white person.

Out of the six women analysed only one had the features that De Cassanova (2004) describes as traditional Black African women's features; i.e. Sarah. Those features are a heavier body, natural unrelaxed hair, big bust, broad hip and dark coloured skins. In other words, the soapie *Generations* perpetuates the negative stereotype about black women that dark skins, natural unstraightened hair and being full-figured is not regarded as beautiful.

Moreover, all the women characters studied except for Sarah have fake nails, adorn their bodies with western jewellery and expensive western style of clothing. Not even once during the period of my study did I see a women character dressed in traditional African attire to celebrate heritage week or any important day that South Africans celebrate. It was only once that Sarah wore a beautiful African attire to a wedding.

Throughout the soapie no women recognises Sarah as a role model but rather as someone who should be felt sorry for because of her inferior status and the manner in which her character is portrayed. So if she wears something traditional that will most likely give women the impression that traditional clothing is something associated with low class.

*Generations* seems to be carrying through the legacy of westernisation which dates back to the seventeenth century when the first colonial invaders set foot on South Africa's shores in 1652 (Ribane, 2006). As De Casanova (2004) puts it, in the soapie *Generations* there seems to be a legacy of colonial racism combined with foreign ideals of beauty. In other words, there is a perpetuation of the stereotype that whiteness is synonymous with beauty. Briefly, western culture highly influences the manner in which women are represented in the soapie *Generations.*

Women's bodies are constructed in a manner that convinces women viewers that the idea of beauty is not naturally given but achievable by all through the correct applications of diverse products. This proves what Foucault meant when he defined bodies as socially and culturally constructed phenomena (Ramazanoglu, 1993).

Even though there is evidence that soapies are a genre that appeals to all women regardless of age or colour in *Generations* there is an under-representation of dark-skinned and middle-aged women. Sharp (undated) mentions that names are part of social rituals and culture, however, in *Generations,* some African women characters are given English names. For example, there is Queen, Bridgette and Sarah.

The reason behind English names for African people dates back to the era of the introduction of Christianity when everything associated with black was seen as inferior. People were forced to abandon their African names, adopt new dress codes and beauty standards (Ribane, 2006).

Even though the soapie *Generations* has a predominantly black cast, that seems to be just tokenism. The cast is black but promotes western ideals of beauty. This could be attributed to the fact that the soapie director Mfundi Vundla, spent most of his life in exile in America; this could have affected his perception of the beauty of a black African woman, hence the misrepresentation of black African women's bodies.

**REFERENCES:**

**PRIMARY SOURCES:**

The Soapie *Generations.* SABC 1

Sekayi, D. (2003) *Aesthetic Resistance to Commercial Influences : The Impact of the Eurocentric Standard of Beauty.* The Journal of Negro Education, 467-477.

De Cassanova, M. (2004) *No Ugly Women.* Gender and Society , 287-308.

**RELATED RESEARCH: UNPUBLISHED DISSERTATIONS**

Khan, P. (1999) *Representations of Women of Colour in the Soap Opera EGoli.* MA  Dissertation. UKZN.

Dentingler, K. (2000) *The Representation of South Africanness in the Locally Produced   Television Production, Generations.* MA  Dissertation. UKZN.

Brown, L. (2002) *Women and Telenovelas in North East Brazil.* (PhD) Dissertation. Cambridge University.

Shikumo, E. (2007)  *A Feminist Analysis of the New Female Body in Popular Electronic Media: A Case Study of Generations.*  Honours Article. UKZN.

Tager, M. (1995) *The Bold and the Beautiful: The Relationship Between The Fictional Universe of the Soap Opera and the Lived Experiences of the Black Urban Viewer.* MA Dissertation. UKZN.

Wood-Hunter, C. (2005) *Flesh for Fantasy: Exposing the Sexualised and Manipulated Female Persona in Contemporary Women's Media.* MA Dissertation. University of Stellenbosch.

**RELATED PUBLICATIONS:**

Allen, R. (1985) *Speaking of Soap Operas.* London, The University of North Carolina Press.

Authurs, J. (1999) *Women's Bodies.* London, Cassell.

Ballantyne, T. (2005) *Bodies in Contact.* London, Duke University Press.

Bolinger, D. (1980) *Language: The Loaded Weapon.* London, Longman.

Bonnie, J. (2006) *The Sage Handbook of Gender and Communication.* London, Sage Publishers.

Burr, V. (1995) *Social Constructionism.* London, Routledge.

Breen, M. (2005) *Butler Matters.* USA, Ashgate Publishing Company.

Butler, J. (1993) *Bodies that Matter.* New York, Routledge.

Cameron, S. (1981) *The Corporeal Self.* USA, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Connell, R. (2002) *Gender.* Oxford, Polity Press.

Crowley, H. (1992) *Knowing Women.* United Kingdom, Open University Press.

De Beer, A. (1993) *Mass Media.* London, Longman Publishers.

de Beauvoir, S. (1984) *After the Second Sex.* United Kingdom, Pantheon Books.

Douglas, M. (1992) *Risk and Blame: Essays in Cultural Theory.* London, Routledge.

Dow, B. (2006) *The Sage Handbook of Gender and Communication.* London, Sage Publishers.

Featherstone, M. (1991) *The Body.* London, Sage Publishers.

Geraghty, C. (1991) *Women and Soap Opera.* Oxford, Basil Blackwell.

Goffman, E. (1971) *The Presentation of Self In Everyday Life.* Philadelphia, University of Pennysylvania Press.

Grosz, E. (1994) *Volatile Bodies.* USA, Elizabeth Grosz.

Hall, S. (1997) *Representation.* London, Sage Publications.

Hancock, P. (2000) *The Body, Culture and Society.* Buckingham, Open University Press.

Hekman, S. (1994) *The feminist Critique of Rationality.* The Polity Reader in Gender Studies , 51-61. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Henning, E. (2004) *Finding Your Way in Qualitative Research.* Pretoria, Van Schaik Publishers.

hooks, B. (1994) *Outlaw Culture.* New York, Routledge.

Lacan, M. (1982) *Feminine Sexuality.* London, Macmillan.

Lorber, J. (1991) *The Social Construction of Gender.* California, Sage Publishers.

MacDonald, M. (1995) *Representing Woman.* London, Edward Arnold.

McKie, L. (2000) *Organizing Bodies.* USA, Mac Millan Press.

Meyers, D. (1997) *Feminist Social Thought.* Britain, Routledge.

Moi, T. (2005) *Sex, Gender and the Body.* New York, Oxford University Press.

Mulvey, L. (1989) *Visual and Other Pleasures.* Hong Kong, Library of Congress Cataloguing.

Phillips, M. (1994) *Women.* The Polity Reader in Gender Studies, 60-62. Cambridge, Polity Press.

Price, J. (1999) *Feminist Theory and the Body.* Cambridge, The University Press.

Ramazanoglu, C. (1993) *Up Against Foucault.* New York, Routledge.

Rabinow, P. (1984) *The Foucault Reader.* New York, Paul Ranibow.

Ramet, S. (1996) *Gender Reversals and Gender Cultures.* London, Routledge.

Ribane, N. (2006) *Beauty: A Black Perspective.* Scottsville, UKZN Press.

Salih, S. (2004) *Judith Butler Reader.* Australia, Blackwell Publishing.

Samuelson, M. (2007) *Remembering the Nation, Dismembering Women?* Pietermaritzburg, University of KwaZulu Natal Press.

Scanlon, J. (2000) *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader.* New York, New York University Press.

Schwarzer, A. (1984) *After The Second Sex.* USA, Mariane Howarth.

Sharp, S. (Undated) Black Women For Beginners. USA, The Unborn Child.

Shiling, C. (1993) *The Body and Social Theory.* London, Sage Publishers.

Smelik, A. (1999) *The Cinema Book.* London, British Film Institute.

Smith, S. (1993) *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body.* USA, Sidonie Smith.

Spender, D. (1983) *Feminist Theorists.* London, The Women's Press.

Spender, D. (1980) *Man Made Language*. London, Routledge.

Thornham, S. (2000) *Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies*. London, Oxford University Press.

Turner, B. (2001) *Society and Culture*. London, Sage Publications.

Unger, R. (1992) *Women and Gender*. New York, McGraw-Hill.

Van Zoonen, L. (1994) *Feminist Media Studies.* London, Sage Publishers.

Yancy, G. (2004) *What White Looks Like*. New York , Routledge.

Weatherall, A. (2002) *Gender, Language and Discourse*. Australia, University of Western Sydney.

Wolf, N. (1991) *The Beauty Myth*. London, Vintage.

Wykes, M. (2005) *The Media and Body Image.* London, Sage Publishers.

**JOURNALS:**

Gordon-Chipembere, N. (2006) *The Misreading of Sarah Baartmans Life by African American Writers*. Agenda: P55-60.

Harper, G. (2005) *Sexuality and Body Image*, Agenda: P59.

Novi, E. (2001) *Eve-olution: The Status of Female Voice in South African Media.* P152-154.

**ON LINE SOURCES:**

www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/anneke/filmtheory.html. Accessed on 27 November 2008

www.googlescholar.com. Accessed on 25 November 2008