

*The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*:  
A comparative ethnographic audience study  
of Zulu-speaking students living in  
residences on the University of Natal's  
Durban campus.

By

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Dedicated to:

The memory of my late father.

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## Declaration

I, Michele Tager, hereby confirm that this thesis is my own work. Any other works have been duly acknowledged. I have not submitted this work for a previous degree, except where acknowledged within the thesis.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'M. Tager', followed by a small dash.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an ethnographic study of the soap opera viewing patterns and interpretations of Zulu-speaking students living in residences on the Natal University's Durban campus who watch *The Bold and the Beautiful* (an American soap opera) and *Generations* (a South African soap opera). It presents an analysis of how the viewing practices of the students compare with the findings of soap opera audience studies conducted abroad.

The students' motivations and reasons for watching both soap operas are investigated. The reason for choosing black students as subjects is that I wanted to determine how a soap opera (*Generations*) which is comprised largely of black cast members and designed with a young black audience in mind, is interpreted and impacts on the lives of said audience, when compared with an American soap opera (*The Bold and the Beautiful*) which has an almost exclusively white American cast, and is popular with young black viewers in spite of the fact that it appears on the surface to be unrelated to their everyday lives.

Individual one-on-one interviews were conducted with 40 students, 20 male and 20 female. The interviews were analysed to gauge how the viewing behaviour of the students differs from, or is similar to, soap opera studies conducted elsewhere in the world. It emerged that the students watch in groups and not alone, and that watching *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* is a social activity, not motivated from loneliness or isolation.

The ways in which the students relate to the characters and situations of both soap operas is also examined, in an attempt to establish the role that these two shows play in the creation of the students' identities. The students displayed a tendency to be more critical of *Generations* than of *The Bold and the Beautiful* in the sense that they compared it (unfavourably) in terms of quality of production, to its American counterpart, as well as in the sense that they analysed storylines in terms of their own lived experiences and were quick to criticise *Generations* when they felt that it did not conform to their notions of the reality of being a black South African.

They accepted situations and characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* far less critically, although they did voice objections to certain characters and situations which they felt were morally questionable in terms of their understanding of right and wrong. It also became apparent that there was a greater emotional involvement with the characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* than with those on *Generations*.

The students' interpretations of (and level of involvement with) situations, characters and storylines are examined, as well as the ways in which they derive pleasure from both soaps and incorporate them into their own lives.

In summary, this thesis examines the consumption of an American and a South African soap opera by a black South African audience.



# Chapter One

## Introduction

### Background to the study

The existing body of literature on soap opera audience research is imposingly large, so the idea of being able to extend or expand it, is a daunting one. When I wrote my Masters dissertation as part of my coursework Masters degree in 1995, I examined the immense popularity of an American daytime soap opera screened on South African television, with black Zulu speaking nurses at King Edward Hospital and black Zulu-speaking students (male and female) at Natal University's Durban campus (Tager, 1995). At the time, South Africa had just undergone major political change and reform with the country's first democratic elections being held in 1994. The country's national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) revised its local content policies to reflect the changing environment of the country and encourage local television productions. A quota system was introduced by the Independent Broadcasting Authority, (IBA) which stated that 20% of the national broadcaster's drama content had to be locally produced (IBA Report, August 1995: 127-129). The reasons for the quota system were two-fold. Firstly, it was designed to promote and develop local talent, particularly from previously disadvantaged sectors of the population, and secondly, it was meant to reflect the population's supposed desire to see more locally produced dramas on their screens. In 1997 the IBA set the quota at for local content across all genres on the public broadcasting channels SABC1 and

SABC2 at 30%. The IBA has since been re-constituted as The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), which has set new local content quotas for specific programme types on television. The drama quota is set to increase to 35% in August 2003 (up from the current 20%) (SABC Group Chief Executive Officer's Overview, 2002: 40).

The question I asked in 1995 was: why *The Bold and the Beautiful* was (and still is) so popular with black, Zulu-speaking audiences, whose daily lived experiences are (on the surface anyway) so far removed from the lives of the characters on this American daytime soap, especially in light of the fact that the IBA and the SABC were instituting policies which seemed to indicate that South Africans want to see local drama productions.<sup>1</sup>

My Masters research reaffirmed the fact that soap operas such as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and to a certain degree, *all* soap operas, have universal appeal, which is what makes it possible for an American almost all-white soap opera to have mass appeal with black South Africans. It is not the *superficial* realities that viewers relate to, but rather the emotional aspects of the characters and plots, which allows them to find similarities between their own lives and the lives of the characters on the screen. The fact that there are no superficial similarities between the lives of black South Africans and the characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* in no way limits the viewers' ability to relate to and identify

with the characters. I suggested this much in my Masters dissertation, and sought to take it further in my PhD thesis. The following South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) audience figures<sup>2</sup> illustrate the popularity of both *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* with both adults and children<sup>3</sup>.

#### SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

##### ADULT

MON 06/05/2002 TO SUN 12/05/2002

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Wed)	19.0
GENERATIONS (Tue)	18.5
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	18.1
GENERATIONS (Fri)	17.7
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	17.5
GENERATIONS (Mon)	17.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Mon)	17.3
EMZINI WEZINSIZWA (Thu)	17.2
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	16.9
GENERATIONS (Thu)	16.7

<sup>2</sup> An analysis of how the figures work is provided in Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix 1 provides audience figures from the top 20 shows on the SABC from 1997 as an indication that the popularity of both *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* has remained consistent over the past five years. The figures in Appendix 1 also indicate how the AMPS figures translate into actual numbers of viewers.

# SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

## CHILDREN

MON 06/05/2002 TO SUN 12/05/2002

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Wed)	22.8
GENERATIONS (Mon)	21.0
GENERATIONS (Tue)	20.2
GENERATIONS (Fri)	19.5
GENERATIONS (Thu)	18.5
EMZINI WEZINSIZWA (Thu)	18.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Mon)	17.1
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	17.0
MUSIC (Mon)	16.1
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	16.0

Given the increased local drama quota being instituted by ICASA, the question I raised in my Masters dissertation is even more pertinent now. In addition, the fact that *Generations* has been given a prime time slot on SABC1 even though it is technically a daytime soap, indicates the SABC's determined effort to attract audiences for local productions. In spite of this however, *The Bold and*

*the Beautiful*, which occupies a far earlier time slot, still attracts a large and faithful following from many of the same viewers who watch *Generations*<sup>4</sup>.

### **Re-assessing the soap opera genre**

One of the aims I set out to achieve in this thesis was a re-appraisal of the soap opera genre or format within a global context generally and a third world context (South Africa) more specifically, examining how a 'global' product like *The Bold and the Beautiful* (global in the sense that it is designed to be distributed throughout the world - currently in more than 80 countries), translates into a third world context like South Africa. At the same time, my intention was to simultaneously examine the consumption of a South African soap opera by the same uniquely South African audience who also watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

### **Global vs. local**

I chose to examine a global phenomenon (*The Bold*) and a local phenomenon (*Generations*) because I wanted to establish the nature of the viewing experiences of a uniquely South African audience, namely young black Zulu-speaking students at a South African university, how they relate to both soaps and what the similarities and/or differences were in the way they watched both soaps and the nature of the pleasure they experience. I chose to

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<sup>4</sup> The technicalities of scheduling and how it impacts on audience figures will be discussed in Chapter 4 and 6.

conduct an ethnographic audience study on young black Zulu-speaking university students and how they interpreted my two exemplar cases, namely *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The precise methodology entailed in an ethnographic study will be expanded upon in Chapter 5.

### **The viewing environment**

The viewing context in which the students are positioned was also of interest to my thesis. While doing my Masters research I was struck by the highly social, communal environment of the television rooms in the university residences. I noticed as well that even if students had television sets in their rooms, they chose to watch either in the communal viewing rooms or they had friends in their rooms to watch with them. The nurses I interviewed in 1995 for my Masters also revealed that they never watched alone. Even when watching at home, they were always accompanied by family, friends or neighbours. It appeared to be an extremely social experience, which was vastly different from the viewing contexts described in research conducted into soap audiences in the United Kingdom and the United States, where the bulk of the literature I read in preparing both my Masters and PhD had been compiled. This research generally associated soap viewing with isolated viewing - individuals watching alone or at most two or more family members watching at the same time. In part, this thesis explores how the viewing context impacts on the viewing

experience of the students and how this in turn affects the nature of pleasure derived from viewing.

#### **Local vs. global: what makes this study relevant?**

South Africa is a country made up of diverse cultures and people, all of whom have their own unique ways of perceiving and making sense of their environment. This thesis aims to provide an in-depth ethnographic analysis of one specific group of individuals within the population of the country, and how they relate to a local product, which is produced with them in mind as opposed to an American product, which is designed for global consumption. Given the distinctive characteristics of this particular group, my aim was also to examine their interaction with the soap opera genre in relation to studies conducted on audiences in other parts of the world, in an effort to gauge the differences and similarities between their consumption practices and those of people in other countries.

Given the diversity of interpretations and reactions that are possible in the context of soap viewing, it is not always possible to extrapolate research findings from other countries and apply them in a South African context, which is why, given the immense popularity of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* with various cultural groups within the country, it is essential that a body of research be built up to explain and describe the phenomenon of soap viewing as it occurs in the varied population groups that make up the South African

population as a whole. In the case of this study, the focus is on young black Zulu-speaking university students.

### **Why *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*?**

When I first began researching my thesis topic I had in mind to undertake a comparative analysis between *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Egoli*, a long-running daytime soap on the country's pay channel, M-Net, as viewed by black, Zulu-speaking students in campus residences. On examining the audience figures for *Egoli* from the South African Advertising Research Foundation, it became obvious that this was not going to be fruitful, as *Egoli* has a negligible black viewership. The bulk of its viewers are white, indian and coloured South Africans. The bulk of their viewership is also Afrikaans speaking. At the time I began my study in 1996, *Generations* was only transmitted once a week and not daily as is the case now, which is why I had not considered it as an option. By the time I officially began doing my research, however, in 1999, *Generations* was transmitted daily. Unlike *Egoli*, the viewership of *Generations* is made up predominantly of black South Africans, among them Zulu speakers, which made it suitable for the comparative study I wished to conduct.

An examination of the audience figures<sup>5</sup> for *Egoli*, *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* revealed that *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American soap opera

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<sup>5</sup> Tables of the audience figures are reproduced in chapter 4 and in the appendices.



imported into South Africa has a much more culturally diverse viewership among South Africans than either *Egoli* or *Generations*, whose audience figures indicate that viewers are divided along racial and linguistic lines.

### **Presentation of research**

It needs to be pointed out to the reader at this stage that I have undertaken to present my research in a slightly unconventional manner, in the sense that I have integrated responses from my interviews *throughout* the thesis instead of presenting a purely synthetic literature survey and following it up with one or more chapters that put forward my research findings. By adopting this approach my intention was to interrogate and enter into dialogue between the readings and my own research. It is for this reason that synthetic integration of theory is at all times dialogued with my own empirical investigations. This is a reflexive methodological approach that I have taken both with respect to my audience survey and the way in which I have critiqued the material available to me. Chapter 2 delineates the methodological approach adopted in the study.

The reader also needs to bear to mind as this study unfolds, is that when taking on the study of television, we are dealing with a complex semiotic phenomenon. "There are no straightforward solutions to its mysteries. Unlike other forms of scientific investigation, there are [...] no

agreed measures for evaluating the practice of TV watching" (Lewis, 1991: 5)<sup>6</sup>.

### **Inclusion of interview transcriptions**

The interview transcriptions have not been included with the thesis. After giving it careful thought and examining other television audience studies based on interviews (Ang, 1985), (Brown, 1994), (Gillespie, 1995), (Hobson, 1994), (Liebes and Katz, 1993), it was decided that the interviews would be made available for examiners should they wish to view them, but that including them would add no value to the thesis other than having to include a separate volume to accommodate them. It is with this in mind that I have included interview quotes throughout the thesis as illustrative examples, so that the interview material becomes part of the thesis and not just an Appendix, which, without explanation, is simply a cumbersome document.

### **The development of television broadcasting in South Africa: an overview of the SABC**

Given that both *The Bold* and *Generations* are screened on South Africa's national broadcaster, the South African Broadcasting Corporation, (SABC) and specifically because *Generations*<sup>7</sup> was born out of a need to change the SABC'S traditional portrayal of Black characters on television

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<sup>6</sup> I made this same assertion in the introduction to my Masters dissertation in 1995.

<sup>7</sup> The background to the creation of *Generations* is dealt with in Chapter 6. For the purposes of the introduction, the reader should know why it is necessary to provide an overview of the SABC's development.

after the country's first free and fair election in 1994. The Corporation also wanted to hasten racial integration in the country, by portraying characters of varying races co-existing and interacting with one another in business and personal relationships.

Historically blacks were excluded from the broadcasting process altogether. The country was launched into the television age on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1976 with the launch of its first official television service, which consisted of a single channel. Broadcasting was only in English and Afrikaans, with none of the country's black languages being included (<http://www.sabc.co.za/thesabc/devep.htm>). Also, the roles allocated to black actors were those which reinforced the status quo in the country at the time, which was that blacks were seen as subordinate to whites.

A second television service was launched in 1982 as TV2/3. Initially they shared one channel. In January of 1983 TV2/3 split into two separate services, and on the 30<sup>th</sup> of March 1985 the SABC introduced a fourth service, TV4 (<http://www.sabc.co.za/thesabc/develop.htm>).

For most of the 1980s the SABC enjoyed a monopoly in television broadcasting. The late 1980s however saw the advent of competition in the form of M-Net, a pay television service, which led the SABC to gear itself up for major restructuring on business-oriented lines in the early nineties to meet the challenges it was facing. Some

of the major developments it made in television during the 1990s included the following:

- The introduction of Topsport Surplus TSS, an unofficial supplementary service launched in 1991. It was relayed on the spare capacity of the TV1 signal and carried the sports programmes that could not be accommodated on the regular TV1 schedule.
- 1 October 1992 saw the consolidation of TV2, TV3, and TV4 into one multicultural channel, CCV-TV (Contemporary Community Values Television).
- The TSS spare channel was discontinued in February 1994 and replaced by NNTV (National Network Television).
- In February 1996, the SABC re-launched its TV1, CCV-TV and NNTV channels as SABC1, SABC2, and SABC3. (<http://www.sabc.co.za/thesabc/develop.htm>)

### **The SABC today and viewer profiles of SABC 1,2 and 3**

The SABC has positioned its three main channels, SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 to serve different markets. SABC1 is aimed at the country's youth, with particular emphasis on black youth. The channel offers programmes in English, isiZulu, isiXhosa, isiNdebele and siSwati. SABC2 caters, amongst others, for the Afrikaans speaking viewer, with news broadcasts in Afrikaans as well as actuality programmes, magazine shows and dramas and soap operas in Afrikaans. It is by no means an exclusively Afrikaans channel as it also has scheduled programming catering for other language groups (English, Setswana, Sepedi,

Xitsonga and Tshivenda. It is aimed at the whole family. SABC3 is aimed predominantly at English speaking adult viewers, with all its programming in English. Its format is one based on entertainment and information.

*Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* are both screened on SABC1. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of the audience demographics for the two soaps.

### ***The Bold and the Beautiful: a brief synopsis of the storyline***

#### **The Foresters**

*The Bold*<sup>8</sup> centres on the Foresters, Eric and Stephanie, and their children, Ridge (oldest son), Thorne, Kristin and Felicia (the sisters feature only intermittently, while the brothers are permanent cast members). The family runs a fashion design company called *Forester Creations*. Brooke Logan Forrester features as the love interest for all the male cast members at different times - she has been involved with all the Foresters and some additional male cast members, such as Dr. Warwick, as well. Taylor Hayes Forester is Brooke's nemesis. Brooke's one 'true love' is Ridge, and she and Taylor are always in a battle to win his affections, although Taylor currently is victorious and Brooke has become involved with Thorne.

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<sup>8</sup> For economy's sake, *The Bold and the Beautiful* may be referred as '*The Bold*'

Brooke's children, by Eric, Brigitte and Rick, are also permanent cast members. In recent years, Rick's teenage marriage to his girlfriend Amber has been of central interest. Amber was pregnant with Rick's baby (there was another possible father) and he was forced to marry her, much to his mother's distress. Amber lost her baby in childbirth and took her cousin Becky's baby as her own. Her deception was eventually discovered, and Rick divorced her. Becky took back her baby but subsequently died of cancer and gave the baby over to Amber and CJ Garrison (Becky's husband). Amber and Rick have subsequently reunited.

### **The Spectras**

Sally Spectra runs a fashion design company called *Spectra Creations*. It is not as successful or stylish as *Forester Creations* despite Sally's efforts to compete. Sally's daughter Macy was married to Thorne Forester twice, but both attempts were a failure. Their last effort to get together was a disaster ending in Macy's death in a car accident. Sally blames the Foresters for her daughter's death (and almost everything else).

Sally was married briefly to the company's head designer, Clarke Garrison. They have a son, CJ. Clarke and Sally have remained friends even though they are divorced, and Clarke works for her. Darla is Sally's personal assistant, and a permanent cast member.

## **Summary**

*The Bold* centres on the lives of these two families - their loves, lives, successes, failures and heartaches.

### ***Generations*: a brief synopsis of the storyline**

Like *The Bold*, *Generations* is based on the lives of two powerful families, The Morokas and the Mthembus, who own rival advertising agencies. At the inception of the soap Archie Moroka ran *New Horizons* and Hilda Letlalo ran *Isis*. Both characters have since left the soap. There are still family members involved in both businesses, but there is no longer the same kind of familial conflict that there was initially. Some of the students I interviewed commented on the fact that it bothered them that the cast had changed so radically in recent years, with the original core cast of the Moroka and Mthembu families having all but disappeared, unlike *The Bold*, which has consistently retained the same cast of characters (and in the case of Eric, Ridge, Brooke, Clarke, Sally and Darla, the same actors as well).

This definitely helps create a sense of continuity for viewers. Radical changes like those effected on *Generations*, do not help to sustain a loyal following or a following with the same degree of emotional attachment. The relationships soap viewers form with characters they watch everyday become close, like those with real-life family and friends. When people disappear from your life

suddenly, it is unsettling. The same is true for loyal soap watchers who see characters leave the show.

Archie Moroka<sup>9</sup> is very similar to Ridge and Eric Forrester, and he emerged as a favourite among the students I interviewed. He is a strong, handsome, successful businessman who prides himself on his commitment to his family. He has suffered a great deal in that he has lost a father as well as a wife, and just prior to leaving the show, he was again having marital problems, and he had recently discovered an illegitimate daughter, who had been working in his home as a maid.

Ntsiki is another core character that has also subsequently left the soap. The students I interviewed loved to hate her, and she was the one character no one struggled to remember or place - the ultimate 'villainess'.

Another long-standing cast member is Archie's sister, Karabo, who has lived through a drug problem and a bad divorce from her doctor-husband, Mandla. Queen Mthembu provides comic relief in *Generations*. Her character is flamboyant and larger than life. The comedic elements provided by Queen are not typical of the daytime soap genre. Queen married into the Moroka family.

Sarah-Lee Moreletse provided much of the melodrama in the soap. She is a recovering alcoholic and she adopted an

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<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, the actor who played Archie Moroka left the soap in 2001/2002 for reasons, which were rumoured to include his unhappiness with the scripts he had to perform, as he found them unrelated to the lives of black South Africans.



HIV positive child, Naledi. She works at *Isis*, and she and Ntsiki are good friends.

Sonny is a bar owner who has been around since the soap started. He is a dependable friend to many of the characters - an all-round 'good guy'.

Baba, the woman who runs the commune in which many of the ~~cores~~ cast members live, is also an original cast member. She is a maternal figure upon whom everyone depends.

There has been a deluge of new characters included on the show since the interviews were conducted. Given that they are therefore not relevant to the interviews, I have chosen only to include those characters that were around during the interviews and who were mentioned by the respondents.

Having provided a general background to the study as well as an overview of the main research questions, the following Chapter describes the methodology of the research conducted for this thesis.

## **Chapter 2**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Prior to beginning work on this thesis I examined at length the various research models that had been adopted by other researchers in the field of ethnographic audience study. Given that I had already used one-on-one personal interviews with respondents for my Masters degree dissertation, I decided to make use of the same research gathering methodology for my Doctoral thesis. I was familiar with the interview approach, and it was also a convenient and efficient approach as the students I was interviewing lived in residences on the University of Natal campus in close proximity to the department in which I am based on the same campus.

#### **Why students living in campus residences?**

John Tulloch (1990) discusses audiences as "socially constructed viewers" who form part of various sub-cultures within society (Tulloch, 1990: 210). He examines and defines what 'sub-cultures' are in the following way:

Sub-cultures are the meaning systems and modes of expression developed by groups in particular parts of the social structure in the course of their collective attempt to come to terms with the contradictions in their shared social

situation.<sup>1</sup> A definitional feature of sub-cultural analysis within sociology has been its distinguishing of the practices and values of certain social groups from those of the 'dominant', 'parent' or 'official' culture (Tulloch, 1990: 211).

Many of the studies conducted into sub-cultures as viewers of soaps (both daytime and prime time soaps), have been looking for "the subversive appeals of certain types of glamorous commercial programming to oppressed groups" (Morley, 1987). These researchers tend to define sub-cultures actively. Not all studies into sub-cultural soap audiences have however had this focus. The work conducted by Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz (1993) for example had a more objective focus, on the 'critical' and 'referential' readings by different groups (Tulloch, 1990: 212). The university students I interviewed are part of their own unique sub-culture, and it was my intention in this thesis to gain insight into the ways they make meanings from and incorporate the soaps into their daily lives and whether they use the soaps in a critical or referential way to make sense of their own lives.

Tulloch talks about the "regimes of watching" soaps. As he puts it, "soap opera has contributed to a process of structuring the day which extends that of the sphere of

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<sup>1</sup> Quote by Murdock taken from Morley, D: 1980: *The Nationwide Audience: Structure an Decoding*, London: British Film Institute

industrial production, positioning women as privileged customers" (Tulloch, 1990: 228). The unique thing about the students I interviewed is that the male students were as involved in watching *The Bold* and *Generations* as the female students - in some cases more so. This phenomenon is examined in greater detail in Chapter 3 and 5.

### **The interview process**

As Nathan Light from the University of Toledo puts it,

Ethnography is the use of careful observation and interviews to explore the ordinary and unknown in daily life, and to find out how people think about the things they do.  
(<http://www.utoledo.edu...ges/nlight/anthprj.htm>)

In the case of the interviews I conducted for this thesis, my aim was to find out *how* and *why* the students watched *The Bold* and *Generations* and to delve into the ways in which they interpreted both soaps as well as to establish the nature of the pleasure they derived from viewing. The nature of ethnography is that it involves an in-depth exploration of people's lives and activities, which is why it was the most appropriate research model to use for the purposes of this thesis. Marie Gillespie quotes H. Leichter (1983) as saying

The criticism and appraisal of TV may be so interwoven with other aspects of family discussion that TV programmes may become the basis for common experiences of family members and become part of their repertoire of personal history. (Leichter: 1979: 36-37, Leichter, H: 1979, *Families and Communities as Educators*, New York: Teachers College Press as referenced in Gillespie, M: 1995, *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, London, Routledge.)

The students living in residences become part of family-like environment with residents coming together to watch TV in a communal TV room. As with a traditional family, their viewing forms part of their daily activities and becomes a part of their everyday lives.

Ethnography is uniquely suited to documenting such interweavings of personal biography and family history with shared TV experiences. The collective memory of a family or peer group may be triggered by shared TV experiences which spark off the recall of incidents, moments and a range of associations from events to emotions. (Gillespie, 1995: 59)

The questions I asked the students during the interviews were designed to highlight the complex ways in which their soap viewing experiences become part of their personal

experiences. Students frequently referred to incidents from their own lives in relation to what they had seen on *The Bold* and *Generations*. Gillespie refers to John Fiske (1989), who argues that "popular cultural capital works to enable subordinate groups to become the producers of their own culture, the makers of their own meanings and pleasure" (Gillespie: 1995: 59).

In the case of the students, *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* have been integrated into their lives in a way that enables them to become the producers of their own unique meanings and pleasures. For example, *The Bold and the Beautiful* has become so much a part of popular culture in South Africa, particularly amongst young black South Africans, that it has even been referred to in the lyrics of Kwaito<sup>2</sup> songs. The students also made it clear during the interviews that they extract information and meaning from both *The Bold* and *Generations* which is applicable to their lives, illustrating how they appropriate the soaps and make them relevant to their own lives, as evidenced in the following extract from an interview with a male student called Vernon:

Michele: Who is your favourite character on *The Bold*?

Vernon: Ridge. He knows what he wants and he thinks about his future. He teaches me to sit down and use my mind. He also puts a lot of thought into his love life!

Michele: Who is your favourite character on *Generations*?

Vernon: Sonny.

Michele: Why?

Vernon: Because he runs a successful business and he always treats people well.

Vernon's choice of favourite characters from both *Generations* and *The Bold*, says something about who he is and what his aspirations are. Even though Sonny and Ridge are completely different types of characters, the one thing they have in common is that they run their lives along a clear set of principles and each in their own way have been successful professionally. This reveals a great deal about Vernon's character. The fact that he is also impressed with Ridge's track record with women, is also telling.

The following extract from an interview with a male student named Siyabonga, also reveals the extent to which *The Bold* and *Generations* have become integrated into the lives of the students and how they play a role in the way the students make sense of their world.

Michele: Do you talk to other guys<sup>3</sup> while you are watching *Generations*?

Siyabonga: Yes.

Michele: What about?

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<sup>2</sup> Kwaito is a form of music not unlike RAP music, which was created in South Africa combining traditional forms of music with western forms – main consumers of Kwaito music are young black South Africans.

<sup>3</sup> Siyabonga lives in an all-male residence.

Siyabonga: We talk a lot about Ntsiki. There are people on campus that we call 'Ntsikis' because they behave like her, always making trouble, not allowing people to live in peace.

As with traditional anthropology, when using ethnography in television audience research, it is mostly to establish why something has become important to people and how they incorporate it into their everyday lives. Soap operas are a part of viewers' daily routines. Their importance in people's lives is what has made them the focus of so many television audience studies. The students I interviewed were no exception, both *Generations* and *The Bold* were a part of their daily activities - for some, they were as rigidly scheduled into a routine as attending lectures. Queen, a female student I interviewed, revealed how she structures her viewing schedule around her daily routine.

Michele: How many times a week do you watch *The Bold*?

Queen: Four days a week. I don't watch on Fridays because I usually go out into town on a Friday night.

Michele: How many times a week do you watch *Generations*?

Queen: Maybe three nights a week. Usually not more than that, because I have to do my studies at night.

As Light points out, ethnography in its examination of people's everyday lives, is especially concerned with the things in which people are 'experts'. "Everyone is an expert about things that are part of their everyday



culture" (<http://www.utoledo.edu...ges/might/anthprj.htm>). Given that soap operas are a daily part of viewers' lives, most of them are experts. Soap viewing requires a great deal of commitment in terms of time, especially if one considers that they generally run for over a decade, as is the case with *The Bold*. By comparison, *Generations* is still in its infancy. Acquaintances and friends come and go in the lives of viewers, but daily soaps and the characters which inhabit them, remain a constant.

The interviews I conducted revealed just how connected the viewers are to their favourite soaps. The students referred to the characters by their first names, which indicated a degree of familiarity reserved for people we know well, and their criticism and praise of characters generally indicated a strong connection to the characters. They often expressed a real interest and concern for the way in which certain situations would play themselves out and how certain characters would be affected, as if they had some personal emotional connection to the characters. In a sense, years of viewing *do* or rather *should* entitle viewers to *some* emotional investment. The following interview extract with a male student named Siyabonga, illustrates the intimate knowledge viewers have of their favourite characters and how they really seem to care about what happens to them.

Michele: Do you talk during *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Siyabonga: Yes, we do talk amongst ourselves; we discuss what is going to happen because we are always left in suspense. We go through the various possibilities of what could happen. Sometimes we even argue!

Michele: Can you give an example of something you argue about?

Siyabonga: For instance, when there was a debacle between Brooke and Taylor over Ridge, there was a lot of noise about who Ridge will go for at the end of the day, so there was great anticipation about what would happen.

Siyabonga's response illustrates how pervasive soaps can be in the lives of the people who watch regularly. Characters like Ntsiki, who is the archetypal 'villainess', have become so much a part of the lives of the students who watch, that she has become synonymous with a particular type of person. According to Siyabonga, a person who displays certain character traits, are referred to as an 'Ntsiki'. Her name is used in a descriptive sense to define a particular kind of person. When you call someone an 'Ntsiki', people know you mean an evil, conniving manipulator.

Light recommends an open-ended almost conversational interview technique as the best way of gathering data for ethnography(<http://www.utoledo.edu...ges/nlight/anthprj.htm>).

I tried to adhere to this as much as possible when conducting my interviews. Even though I had a basic set of questions, I tried, through conversation, to let the respondents guide the interview process. Setting a

conversational tone in an interview is vital, as the process intimidates many people. None of the students I interviewed had ever been part of this kind of study before, and many were nervous, especially when they saw the tape recorder. I had to spend a few minutes at the beginning of each interview explaining the nature of my research and how the interview process worked. Once I explained to students that I would only be using their first names, and that no one would know who they were, they visibly relaxed and I could then ease into the interview.

Given that I am myself an avid soap watcher, it was not difficult for me to relate to the students as fellow viewers rather than purely as research subjects. Many soap opera audience studies have revealed that there is sometimes an element of shame attached to viewing as soaps are so often described as mind numbing. I most certainly saw my viewing habits as a clandestine activity, which I should not allude to publicly. There was no such sense of shame among the interviewees, and they taught me to embrace rather than hide my daily indulgence.

Obtaining a detailed and accurate account of an individual's experience is the whole purpose of ethnography, which is why it is important to be patient during the interview process. The nature of the interview varies from person to person, as would regular conversation. No two interviews are ever exactly the same, as each interviewee is a unique individual. One has to bear

this in mind when conducting ethnographic audience research. It is what makes it both fascinating in terms of the wealth of information it can unearth, as well as so 'narrow' in the sense that it is never really representative - one cannot make generalizations based on the findings of an ethnographic study. This does not however detract from the validity of ethnographic audience research. As Goetz and LeCompte point out in relation to participant observation as part of ethnography, it provides the opportunity for continual data analysis and comparison to refine constructs and to ensure the match between scientific categories and participant reality. [It is also] conducted in natural settings that reflect the reality of the life experiences of participants more accurately than do more contrived laboratory settings (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984: 221).

As E. Murphy notes, "in relation to external validity, the aim of many ethnographic studies is not to make generalizations on the basis of data gathered. The aim is to uncover an idiographic knowledge of the world" (<http://www.stemnet.nf...phy/emurphy/ethno.html>). In keeping with the nature of ethnographic audience research, I have not presented diagrams or statistics associated with my research findings. Rather, I am presenting the reader with insights and observations gleaned from the interviews in an effort to better understand the viewing dynamics and experiences of the individuals interviewed. Ien Ang in the preface to her seminal work on *Dallas* states the following:

I wanted to encourage serious reflection on the phenomenon [Dallas] itself and, in order to do this, I deemed it useful to introduce the interested Dutch reader to theoretical perspectives which stem mainly from Anglo-Saxon media and cultural studies. Dutch intellectual communities were largely unacquainted with these theories. The book therefore acquired a somewhat 'pedagogic' nature (Ang, 1985: vii).

Ang wrote the original Dutch version *Watching Dallas* in 1982. Even though this thesis does not have pedagogical aspirations, it nevertheless came as a shock when I submitted my PhD proposal to the Higher Degrees Committee at Natal University for approval in 1996, and they queried the term 'ethnographic audience research', saying that they objected to the implication that the research would be 'ethnically' motivated. I had to re-submit my proposal with a lengthy theoretical explanation of what ethnographic audience research is, along with a dense bibliography of other studies conducted in the field, at which point they withdrew their objection to the term.

This experience alerted me to the fact that television audience research (and ethnography in relation to television audience research in particular), is still in its infancy in South Africa, and the broader academic community in the country has not yet come to terms fully with this kind of research or with the importance of television, and in my case, particularly soap operas and

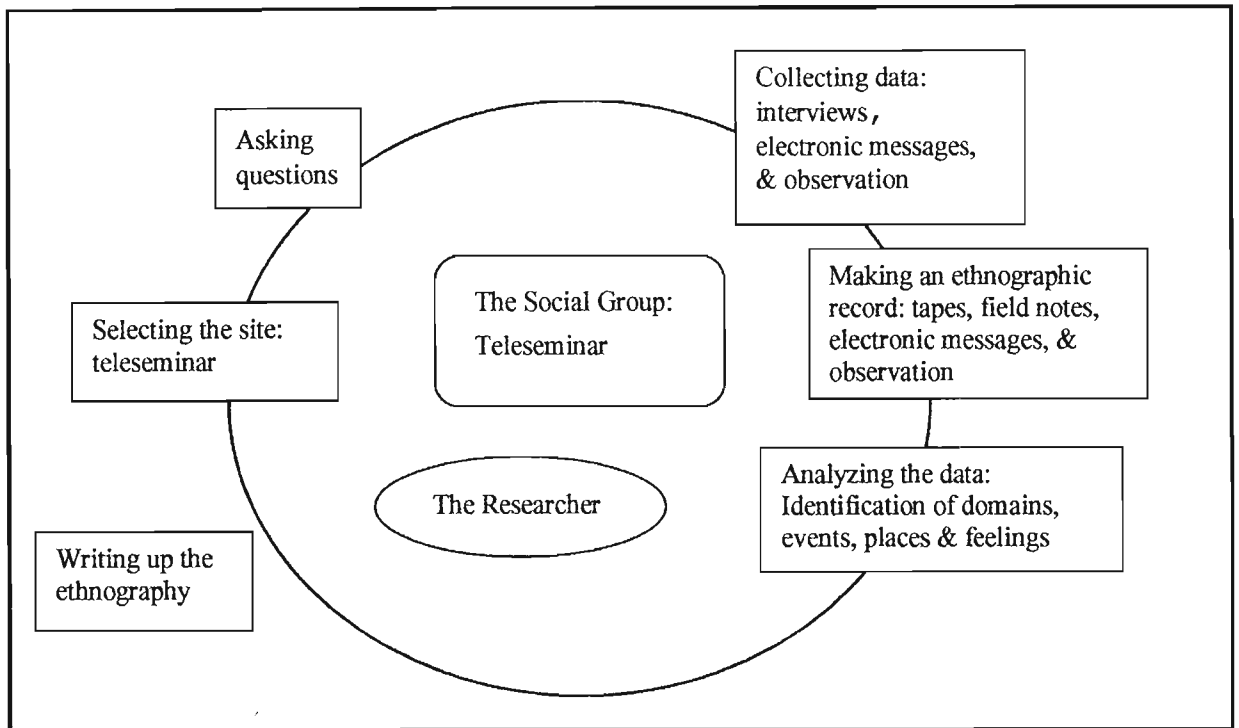
how they form part of the country's national consciousness and popular culture. In 2002 not much has changed. There are still relatively few published studies on South African soap opera audiences when compared to the extensive research available in the United States and Europe.

Apart from presenting a framework within which *Dallas* could be taken seriously, however, I also wished to contribute to further problematization and understanding of the social, cultural and political role of serials like *Dallas* (Ang, 1985: vii).

I hope to achieve in this thesis with *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* in relation to daytime soaps in a South African context, a small measure of what Ang set out to do in her study on *Dallas* with Dutch viewers.

I found the following diagrammatic representation of the ethnographic research cycle compiled by Mary Lynn Rice-Lively (<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~marylynn/ethno.html>) particularly useful.

## The Ethnographic Research Cycle



The diagram visually depicts the linkages between the processes of production and consumption. Traditionally these have been examined in isolation. The diagram shows is that the acts of production and consumption are linked and have to be studied as such in order to fully understand an audience's reactions and interpretations to the final product. It is for this reason that I have chosen to analyse the production processes behind *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. As this thesis is based on a comparative analysis and I felt it was necessary to gain insight into the way these two soaps are produced in the context of an analysis of the differences between a local soap opera, originally designed for South African

consumption, and an international product, designed for global consumption in order to make better sense of the way the viewers relate to both.

#### **Finding people to interview and defining the interview process<sup>4</sup>**

Once I had established that I wanted to research students living in residences on the University of Natal Campus, my next task was to go about finding people to interview. This proved to be more difficult than I had initially anticipated.

All the campus residences are a short walk or car drive from the department in which I am based, but gaining access to respondents was problematic. Eventually I went about finding subjects via students in my department who had friends or relatives living on campus. They recruited interview subjects on my behalf. They selected people based on whether or not they watched both *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* on a weekly basis (one to three episodes a week of each soap). The facilitators were paid a fee, but the students themselves were not paid for their participation.

Being a student on the same campus as the respondents I interviewed, as well as being a regular viewer of both soaps, provided important referential connections between



the students and I. We immediately had things in common, which made 'breaking the ice' in the interviews a great deal easier. Gillespie (1995) immersed herself in the lives of the young people she interviewed by teaching at a high school in Southall for several hours a day during the course of conducting her fieldwork in order to establish relationships of trust and reciprocity (Gillespie, 1995: 61). I was fortunate in that this relationship was facilitated by the fact that I shared the same campus life as the students and that the facilitators I used recruited people they knew, so there was immediately a sense of trust and informality.

The notion of informality in the interview process was extremely important, as it was essential that the students felt at ease in order to establish a conversational tone for the interviews. If they had felt intimidated or nervous, the interviews would have been stilted and less fruitful. There was less of a congenial air when the interviews were conducted in my office on campus as opposed to the interviews that were conducted in the residences in students' rooms. This was obviously due to the fact that in the case of the latter, the interviews were in surroundings familiar to the students, whereas the former was foreign to the students and therefore less conducive to chatty conversation. Even though it took a little longer, the students eventually relaxed.

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<sup>4</sup> The interview methodology is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5

The interviews were all recorded on audiotape. Initially the students were a little nervous about their answers being recorded, but once I had explained that the interviews were being recorded so they could later be transcribed, and that they would remain anonymous, they generally relaxed. In very few cases, there was a persistent awkwardness as a result of the tape recorder. In these instances the students kept on glancing at the machine and were unable to completely relax. Once the interviews got going, most of the students seemed to forget that the tape recorder was on and were only aware of its presence when it was turned off at the end of the interview. Their reactions indicated that they had forgotten it was on.

In certain instances, the students, particularly male students, seemed delighted by the fact that their responses were being recorded. Gillespie (1995) notes a similar phenomenon with her interview subjects. "My use over a period of two years of a notebook and sometimes an audio tape recorder was eventually ignored by certain informants who claimed to enjoy the fact that their ideas, views and lives were being taken seriously" (Gillespie, 1995: 62-63).

### **Why students living in residence?**

During the research I conducted for my Masters dissertation (1995), I interviewed black students and nurses who spoke English as a second language and who watched *The Bold and*

*the Beautiful*. At that stage (1995) *Generations* was not screened daily, but only once weekly. It struck me then how unique the viewing experiences of the students living in residences were, and how they differed from the experiences recorded in studies conducted on European and American audiences. My aim was to examine what motivated these black South African students to watch both an American soap opera and a South African soap opera, both of which are consistently in the top ten most popular programmes scheduled on SABC1, and how they related to the characters on both soaps and what meanings they derived from both.

**Field work: finding out more about *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful***

Dorothy Hobson (1982) conducted a study on the long running popular British daytime soap, *Crossroads*, in which she examined "the production of popular television programmes and the understanding or appeal of these programmes for their audience" (Hobson: 1982: 11). Hobson spent time observing the production processes of the soap and interviewing key staff on the production team. I used a similar process for this thesis, although my examination was not as involved or lengthy as Hobson's. I conducted an interview with the creator and executive producer of *Generations*, Mfundi Vundla, in 1995 and subsequent interviews with one of the producers, Elsja Starck and one of the directors, Maynaard Kraak. As Hobson notes

Many of those involved in the programme really had nothing to gain from helping me and potentially they had much to lose. Outsiders studying a work process and questioning those engaged in their daily occupation are always a potential threat - what will they eventually write or say about you? And will there be repercussions from their findings? (Hobson, 1982: 11)

My experience with the *Generations* production team was phenomenal. They immediately agreed to speak to me when I called to ask for interviews, and they arranged for me to come and watch a taping of an episode. They introduced me to all the crewmembers and the actors involved in the scenes they were taping and also allowed me to sit in on the editing process. The interviews with Maynaard Kraak and Elsja Starck were recorded onto audiocassette and later transcribed. The interview with Mfundu Vundla was not recorded - I took notes during the interview. This helped me to gain invaluable insight into how soaps are put together, and also informed my research into the making of *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

The information I gathered on *The Bold* was based on information I retrieved from the show's website as well as from a book, which was published on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, *The Bold and the Beautiful: A tenth anniversary celebration* (1996) by Robert Waldron. The 'book' came in the form of

two audiocassettes recorded by two of the soap's long-standing stars, John McCook (Eric Forester) and Susan Flannery (Stephanie Forester). Although I was unable to visit the set of the soap in Los Angeles due to the prohibitive expense of undertaking such a trip, the book and the Internet provided a great deal of information which was invaluable.

### **Formulation of the Research Design**

Liebes and Katz stated in their explanation of their research design for their study on *Dallas*:

Ideally, we should like to have empirical data on how people interact with their television sets under natural conditions: how they arrange themselves before it, how they decode what they see and hear; how they help each other to do so; how they talk about it; whether they refer to the medium or to specific programs; whether they have categories for classifying programs and criticizing them, and if so, what they are, whether and how they weave the experience of viewing into their social and political roles. But such data are hardly available, suggesting to some that it is not worthwhile to go into depth about the experience of viewing. We think otherwise. (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 20).

I agree with Liebes and Katz. The kind of in-depth exploration they conducted into viewers of *Dallas* served as a guide for this study. Like Liebes and Katz, this thesis aimed to explore an audience outside of America watching an American programme, to examine the ways in which they decode and absorb the show into their daily lives.

While Liebes and Katz explored countries in which *Dallas* was successful and one in which it was unpopular, this thesis is about the analysis of the ways in which a particular South African audience responded to an American soap opera and a South African soap opera, in order to establish the nature of their involvement with both, and the differences and similarities in the nature of their attachment to characters and interpretation of storylines etc.

My Masters dissertation examined two audience groups watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*. I chose for my Doctoral thesis to examine one audience group and their viewing of two different soap operas, both very popular with the same group and both of which potentially "shape identities, affect social relations, set agendas for discussion, and shape consciousness (Gerbner<sup>5</sup> would say, false consciousness)". (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 21). The pervasive influence of American soap operas on South African youth is viewed by some in a disparaging light. As

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<sup>5</sup> Liebes and Katz are referring here to the following paper: Gerbner, G et al. 1979. "The demonstration of Power" in *Journal of Communication* 29: 177-196

Chris Barron of the *Sunday Times* newspaper wrote in an article about a locally produced detective series called *Dick Sithole*, "A self effacing honest lawyer-cum-detective [Dick Sithole] is all that stands between South Africa and mass Hollywood-induced hypnosis" (Barron, July 20 1997: 15). In the same article, Barron quotes the following viewership figures:

In the week ending July 6 [1997], *Dick Sithole* got an audience response rating of 15,4 from all language groups against 13,2 for *The Bold*. This translates roughly into a minimum of 1.7 million viewers against a minimum of 1.5 million. *Dick Sithole* has become the thin (black) line protecting us from a state of general idiocy. But the minds of at least 1.5 million South Africans are still being colonised by American trash (Barron, July 20 1997: 15).

Barron's article does not mention that *Dick Sithole* (no longer screened on the SABC) occupied a prime time slot whereas *The Bold* does not, and yet the viewership figures do not reflect this disparity. When examined in light of the fact that it is in a far earlier time slot, *The Bold's* popularity is even more striking.

The opinion expressed by Barron is not uncommon and not unique to South Africa. The pervasiveness of American television imports in countries outside of the USA has

evoked criticism and an alarmist attitude all over the world. Miller (1995) discusses this trend in his research on an American soap opera that is extremely popular in Trinidad. Regardless of whether one thinks this influence (particularly of American soap operas) is 'good' or 'bad', there is no denying its existence. Rather than moralise about it, this thesis explores how students make sense of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Many of the students I interviewed referred to *Generations* as a 'local *Bold*'. In many respects the producers have modelled it on its American daytime counterparts (including *The Bold and the Beautiful*), which means that in many ways it promotes the same values and explores the same themes as *The Bold and the Beautiful*, making its influence 'disturbing' according to anti-soap opera moralists.

As Ang points out, 'popularity' is an extremely complex phenomenon. She says of *Dallas*:

At a certain moment the programme achieved a kind of popularity other than merely in terms of numbers of viewers. It had repercussions on the whole culture, the involvement of the viewers became of a different order. At a certain moment you could no longer avoid talking about the popularity of *Dallas* when people started using categories from it to help interpret their experiences. This is a secondary type of popularity, which it has now completely lost. The same number of people still watch



it, but it is no longer active in the collective consciousness (Ang, 1985: 5).

Ang's statement reveals that the intensity of popularity of a prime time soap like *Dallas*<sup>6</sup> is finite. Even though it is still re-run throughout the world, the initial wave of popularity has waned when compared with when it was first broadcast. What makes daytime soaps so unique and potentially so invasive in the collective consciousness is the fact that they continue to run for decades, which means that they become embedded in the collective consciousness in ways that other genres never can. Another factor, which makes daytime soaps, so much a part of people's daily lived experiences is that they are on television everyday. One may not approve of their moral content and the effect they have on viewers, but there is no ignoring their ongoing existence.

The following paradox sums up what soap operas are

The soap world thrives on a lack of reality. What we see, however, seems to be closer to our 'real world' than we might imagine.....The content of the soap opera world approaches our 'real' world also. Stories are almost exclusively confined to a consideration of human problems <http://www.bctv.net/telcom/tel13/10soaps.html>).

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<sup>6</sup> The distinctions between prime time and daytime soaps are discussed in Chapter 7.

How do daytime soaps manage to combine a sense of unreality with intense reality as lived by the characters? This seeming contradiction is what underlies the appeal of daytime soap operas. Neither *Generations* nor *The Bold and the Beautiful* appear to mirror the daily lived reality of the students I interviewed, and yet they follow both intently and become absorbed in the lives of the characters on both soaps and relate the experiences of the characters to their own lives. How? Soaps are about human drama, and even though we may not have encountered people in our lives that physically resemble characters in the soaps we watch, we relate not so much to their physical appearance as to their emotional experiences, situations in which we may have found ourselves or people we know. Herein lies the emotional connection. In their own unique and burlesque way, the characters in our favourite soaps are human just like us and they suffer the trials and tribulations of love and life, success and failure, which is what draws us to them and allows us to identify with them. It is this connection and relationship that the students have with the characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* that this thesis attempts to explain.

What must also be borne in mind when analysing the popularity of daytime soaps is that the viewer gets to watch his or her favourite characters develop and grow over time. In this sense the characters become like friends or acquaintances in our lives - they grow and change just like the people in our lives and just like us. This is one

reason why we take them into our lives and become embroiled in their affairs. Watching the lives of television characters develop over a period of more than a decade constitutes a considerable commitment.

We see the same characters day after day, just as we see the same characters week after week in evening dramatic shows. But soap opera characters change. They grow older; marry; have children. All of these things happen because soaps stay on the air for decades (<http://www.bctv.net/telcom/tell3/10soaps.html>).

### **Gathering empirical data<sup>7</sup>**

The audience figures used in this thesis were taken from the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF) library in Johannesburg. All the All Media Products Survey (AMPS), Television Audience Measurement Survey (TAMS) as well as living Standards Measure (LSM) and Radio Audience Survey (RAMS) are housed in their facility and they allow the public access. They were extremely helpful in guiding me through how the TAMS figures are compiled and distributed, and all the reproductions of audience figures are courtesy of the SAARF library.

In chapter 4 I examine the SAARF figures, specifically the TAMS reports in an effort to gauge the audience which watches both *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* and

where the students I interviewed fit into those figures. The chapter also outlines the shortcomings of the TAMS figures as regards gaining insight into the ways in which audiences interpret programmes and what motivates them to watch.

### **Outline of questions posed in the interviews with the students**

The following is a breakdown of the questions I asked the students in the interviews I conducted. I used a basic guideline so that I could ensure that all students were asked the same set of questions. Even though I stuck to them fairly rigidly, I tried to let the students take the interviews in other directions as well if they wanted to. What often happened is that one question would lead to conversation around related issues not necessarily covered in the formal questions. For example, in several interviews, discussions developed around the question of rape, which had been dealt with in both *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The interview questions were as follows<sup>8</sup>:

- How many times a week do you watch?
- Why do you watch?
- Where do you usually watch?

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<sup>7</sup> The nature of the TAMS figures, how they are compiled and what they mean is dealt with in Chapter 4.

<sup>8</sup> Please note that all the questions were posed to the students on both soap operas, except where the questions were directed at one or the other as indicated.

- Do you watch alone or with other people?
- If you do watch with people, with whom do you usually watch?
- Do you talk during the soap?
- If so, what do you usually talk about?
- Who is your favourite character and why?
- Who is your least favourite character and why?
- Does the fact that the majority of the characters on *The Bold* are white Americans prevent you from identifying with and becoming emotionally involved with the characters? If yes, why? If no, why?
- Does the fact that *Generations* is a local production make it easier to relate to and identify with the characters? If yes, why? If no, why?
- Do you discuss the soap with friends and or family who watch? If yes, why? If no, why?
- If you have missed an episode, how do you go about finding out what happened?
- Do you know anyone who behaves like any of the characters or who reminds you of any of the characters on the soap?
- Do you change channels when you are watching?
- Do you find the soap realistic?
- What do you think about the quality of the production of the soap?
- Which soap do you think is a better quality production?

- Do you form perceptions of what intimate relationships should be from the soap?
- Soaps emphasise how fragile relationships are. Does this make you more cautious when it comes to relationships?

The following chapter provides an overview of soap opera audience research.

## Chapter 3

### Soap Opera Audience Research

This chapter will explore the specific nature of the soap opera viewing experience, and provide insights into the soap opera audience by means of examining various studies conducted amongst soap opera viewers throughout the world. The distinctions between the viewing experiences described by the informants interviewed for this thesis and studies conducted on soap audiences in other parts of the world will also be analysed.

When audiences become engrossed in a specific television programme and feel that they cannot get through the day without their 'daily dose', it is evident that a distinct attachment to, and dependence upon a show, has developed. This is especially true among soap opera viewers. So much so that it is common for viewers to refer to themselves as 'addicts'. The compelling nature of soap viewing is substantiated in the interviews conducted for this thesis, in that the majority of students questioned asserted that they never change the channel while watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* or *Generations*, even during the advertising breaks, for fear that they will miss something as evidenced in the following quote from an interview with a student called Luleka

Michele: Do you ever change channels when watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* or *Generations*?

Luleka: No. Because we find it interesting we even hate adverts - we don't want any disruptions so we don't change channels.

Nhlanhla, a male student, said that no one dares change channels in his residence when either *The Bold* or *Generations* is on.

Michele: Do you ever change channels during *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Nhlanhla: No.

Michele: Why not?

Nhlanhla: I think 70% of the residence likes *The Bold*, so you can't mess around with the channel.

Michele: Do you ever change channels while watching *Generations*?

Nhlanhla: No, I could never do that as there are many people watching *Generations*.

A common criticism leveled at soaps and their audience, is that watching soaps it is a mindless activity which connotes a lack of intellect. This has a great deal to do with the origins of the genre. It was originally designed to entertain homemakers and sell household products. The act of viewing has therefore been perceived as being associated with boredom and lack of intellectual



stimulation, or an escape from mundane reality. Though housewives may have been their original target audience, recent studies have shown that soaps are now watched by a vast range of viewers, spanning gender, age and cultural divides. Most people, no matter what their occupations, have days when they want to escape from the sometimes-harsh realities of their lives, and soaps provide this relief, whether one is a student or a housewife, a teenager or a grandparent. The act of television viewing in general is associated with feelings of guilt on the part of the viewer, as the act of watching is associated with boredom, laziness and a lack of interest in the world outside, hence the coining of terms such as 'couch potato' to describe avid TV watchers.

The term 'soap opera' is one of derision. As Charlotte Brunsdon points out:

To say something is soap opera is to say that, minimally, it is bad drama. Frequently, it is to say that the drama is slackly written, cheaply produced, poorly acted. Perhaps more significantly, it is to imply cliché, banality, and bathos. It is never a term of approbation. This meaning of the term 'soap opera' is imbricated with another, more general meaning. In this usage, the term 'soap opera', with all the evaluative weighing I have described, is used metonymically to refer to television itself. Thus

reference is made to a low-prestige leisure activity, engaged in thoughtlessly by those who do not have the inner resources to do anything else. (Brunsdon, 1994: 116).

Despite its classification as 'trash', soap operas "constitute one of the most popular and resilient forms of storytelling ever devised" (Allen, 1995: 1). What became evident during the course of the interviews conducted for this study, was that there were no feelings of guilt among the informants. Rather, they seemed to delight in their addiction. There was a feeling amongst some that they felt bad for watching when they had work that needed to be done, but there was no sense of shame in being a 'soap viewer'. This was surprising given that a large percentage of the informants interviewed were male, and soaps are generally classified as a women's genre. Some admitted that they were coerced into watching by their girlfriends, but openly acknowledged they quickly became hooked. The TV rooms at the all-male residences are full when *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* are on, as evidenced in the earlier quote from Nhlanhla.

Another reason cited by both male and female informants for initially watching, was peer pressure. So much of the daily conversation amongst their friends revolved around *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* that they felt they had to start watching in order not to feel left out. A male student called Balungile said that he started watching

*The Bold and the Beautiful* because so many of his friends (particularly female friends) spent so much time talking about it that he felt left out.

Michele: Why do watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Balungile: I watch it because it's something I feel I have to watch because so many people I know watch it (especially girls). It is discussed all the time and I just feel left out if I don't know what they are talking about.

This kind of pressure has been documented by researchers in many soap audience studies. It is generated by the fact that much of the enjoyment of watching soaps centres on discussing them, and these discussions often take place long after an episode has been viewed. As many people watch alone at home, they have to wait until the following day to discuss their favourite soap with colleagues or friends. Dorothy Hobson documented this phenomenon in a study, which examined, amongst other things, the way in which soap operas fit into the "everyday cultural environment of work" (Hobson, 1994: 150). A friend of Hobson's told her that the women in her office discussed soap operas at work. She interviewed the women in her friend's office, whose jobs involved the staffing of schools in the public education system in the City of Birmingham. They ranged in age from 23 to 35. Hobson conducted the interviews in their lunch hour, at a club-cum-restaurant near their office.

Hobson discovered that their conversations around soaps included filling in anyone who had missed the previous evening's episode. The soaps also came in for heavy criticism, which indicated that they were far from accepting of everything that they were being shown. The interviews also revealed that the women had strong affinities to specific characters, and spent a lot of time analysing the behaviour of their favourite characters, and comparing how they would have reacted in the same situations.

Though on different continents and dealing with very distinct groups of viewers, much of what Hobson documented in her study, was borne out during the interviews conducted for this thesis. The interviews revealed that the pleasure of watching a soap goes on long after the evening's viewing is over. All the students I interviewed said that *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* formed part of their daily discussions and interactions with friends.

What distinguishes *this* study from the one conducted by Hobson however, is the actual viewing context of the soaps. The women in Hobson's study watched at home in the evenings - their discussions with their colleagues had to wait until the following day. For the students I interviewed, viewing is a communal experience, with a group of people gathered together for the sole purpose of watching their favourite soaps. The groups took on one of two forms: watching in the communal television room, or gathering round a television

set in someone's room. The latter is obviously a more intimate group, limited to 4 or 5 people, depending on the size of the room, whereas the former encompasses a far larger group, made up of individuals and groups of friends, who are not all acquainted with one another. Hobson's informants were a fairly close knit group of colleagues / friends:

The closeness of the group of women had an effect not only on the free way that they spoke about the television programs which they viewed and these programs' relation to their own lives, but also on the actual mode of discourse in which they operated. They interrupted each other, finished each other's sentences, and presented the same word in unison to respond to something which someone had said....Their comments came quickly on the heels of each other. They were often talking amongst themselves rather than answering questions which I had asked. I might ask the first question but they would move on to other topics as they took the discussion to areas which they would discuss naturally amongst themselves (Hobson, 1994: 153)

Though Hobson's interviews took the form of a group discussion in a social environment familiar to the informants, and the interviews for this thesis were conducted with informants one-on-one either in my office,

on campus or in the rooms of the students in their residences, part of the research process for this study involved sitting in on viewings in the television rooms of the residences and in the rooms of students. This provided the opportunity to witness the interaction between friends who watch, and my impressions of the interaction between them were similar to those observed by Hobson amongst the female co-workers.

Initially, my presence was disturbing to the viewers, particularly in the men's residences where I was the only female present. Many of the viewers turned around to look at me and there was a fair amount of whispering as they tried to establish who I was and what I was doing there, before my facilitator would announce who I was. After the announcement, there would be even more chatter and staring. Once the soap had been on for a few minutes however, they seemed to forget that I was there. I checked with the facilitators (students who lived in the residence in question) whether the viewing behaviour I had witnessed was 'normal', and they verified that it was. I observed several viewing sessions in various residences and the patterns were very similar.

What was striking about these gatherings in the television rooms of the residences, was the intense level of involvement displayed by the viewers in the soap they were watching. There was chatter amongst small groups and individuals about what was playing itself out, as well as

more raucous discussions between different groups and individuals. The conversation audible to me was only about the soap, and this is apparently the norm, with most subjects saying that the discussion that goes on during the viewing of *The Bold and Generations* is strictly about the contents of the soap. During the advertisement breaks, viewers' discussion took on the form of a debate, with arguments about who was considered bad or good. During *The Bold*, the character who caused the most consternation, was that of Brooke Logan. There appear to be two schools - one that applauds her efforts to win the affections of men (usually married ones) and another, which views her as a home wrecker. Even while the soap was still playing, viewers (both male and female) would shout insults or praise for Brooke.

There was also a great deal of speculation during the advertisement breaks about how particular stories would play themselves out. These conversations would, according to the informants, continue after leaving the TV room, usually taken up again the following day with groups of friends who may not have watched together. The subjects discussed, as well as the aspect of re-telling an episode for friends who had missed it, revealed in Hobson's study, were very similar to those documented in *this* study.

In addition to sitting in on 'group' viewing sessions, I also observed some more intimate viewings in the rooms of students with their own television sets. The groups that

gathered in the rooms to watch, knew each other well, and, as in the case of the large viewing sessions, my presence initially created an awkward atmosphere. Once the soap got going though, it was as if I was not there. During the advertisement breaks, I asked questions informally of the small group, which erupted into discussions and disagreements amongst the group, who seemed to forget that I was the one who had posed the initial question. The same level of intimacy witnessed by Hobson, was evident amongst these gatherings of friends.

### **Criticism of Local Productions**

There is a tendency in countries outside of the USA to compare their own local productions unfavorably with those imported from America. Usually the local productions come under severe criticism. This is evidenced in a paper entitled *The consumption of soap opera: 'The Young and the Restless' and mass consumption in Trinidad* by Daniel Miller. His research into the viewership of the American soap opera *The Young and the Restless* in Trinidad, revealed the following:

There is considerable concern [in Trinidad] with the degree of quality and significance of locally made television, and a ready tendency to contrast it unfavorably with imports. There have been several locally made drama serials. The series current at the time of my research (called No



*Boundaries*), which had the open-ended structure of a soap opera, focused on ethnic distinctions, which are recognized as the "proper" problematics of Trinidadian society with a considerable political impact. The stereotypes were exaggerated, with the East Indian Trinidadian involved in an arranged marriage, something virtually extinct in contemporary Trinidad. (Miller, 1995: 221)

During my interviews a pattern of criticism levelled at *Generations* emerged. One of the questions posed to the students was what they thought of the standard of production of *Generations* when compared with *The Bold*. Most said that in their opinion the standard of the latter was superior to that of *Generations*. Some saw it as a 'South African' *Bold*. A student called Nelly had the following to say:

Michele: Does the fact that *Generations* is a South African production make it easier to relate to the characters?

Nelly: Yes and no. Some of the things they [*Generations*] do are too artificial for South Africa and it's like they are trying to be more like *The Bold*. I think they [*Generations*] should be more true to the way things happen in this country.

The major criticisms were against the standard of acting on the local soap. It was perceived to be 'unconvincing' and 'amateurish' in the case of specific actors. The actress who plays Queen came under some heavy censure even though they thought she was amusing, they found her acting exaggerated and overdone. The following quotes illustrate the kind of criticism which was levelled at *Generations* by the students. Leslie, a male student, had the following to say:

Michele: What do you think of the quality of the production on *Generations* compared with *The Bold*?

Leslie: I think it is good for a South African production, but they act better on *The Bold*, except for Ntsiki and the little girl with AIDS [on *Generations*].

Interestingly, their criticisms did not stop them from watching. There was an almost touching sense of loyalty to a local production and a willingness on the part of most of the students to give the actors a chance to improve themselves. A male student called Rothiwa felt that *The Bold* was a better quality production but that *Generations* should be given a chance to 'catch up'.

Michele: Do you think there is a difference in the quality of production between *Generations* and *The Bold*?

Rothiwa: I think the American one is better than the South African one because those guys [*The Bold*] have been doing it for quite a long time and *Generations* is quite new.

Another area of production which met with reproof, was that of characterisation. Some of the students felt that some of the lifestyles portrayed on the soap were so far removed from their own lived experience as black South Africans as to be unbelievable. Although this did not deter them from watching, it did seem to annoy them. One situation which troubled a student called Themba was the fact that several of the black characters lived together in a house owned by a white middle-aged Afrikaans woman.

Themba: its not realistic having people like that staying together in one house in South Africa!

Despite this criticism, Themba still felt that many of the situations on *Generations* were believable and relevant to his life.

Themba: I think because they are South African people acting and you know it [*Generations*] is set in South Africa it makes it interesting and relevant to my life.

When asked about the fact that *The Bold* is set in another country portraying lives of characters seemingly far

removed from their own, none of the students saw this as a barrier to identifying with the characters. They all felt that the problems experienced by the characters were universal and they could therefore relate to them.

Ironically, the fact that *Generations* is a local production, made identification more difficult in the sense that the soap was being critically 'judged' by the students. By virtue of the fact that it is a South African show, it was scrutinized more rigorously than its American counterparts.

In her paper "Soap Operas at Work" (1994) referred to earlier in this chapter, Dorothy Hobson notes that the British female office workers she interviewed differentiated between British and American soaps, with the former being categorized as 'down to earth' and the latter as 'fantasy', with their main appeal being the pleasure derived from the clothes and beautiful homes (Hobson, 1994: 156). While the American soaps represent fantasy, the British soaps were judged by the women for their realism. It stands to reason that the subject of everyday life in Britain is something with which the women are very familiar, and they are therefore in a position to judge whether the soaps they are watching adhere to the reality of everyday life in Britain as they claim to do. They expect realism from these soaps and criticize the soaps when they do not deliver the level of authenticity they expect (Hobson, 1994: 157-159).

Even though the producer of *Generations*, Mfundu Vundla, said that what he initially set out to do when the show began in 1995, was to present an 'ideal' or 'future representation' of black South Africans in accordance with the brief he was given by the SABC (see chapter on Production), six years down the line, viewers expect a representation of their existing reality. The aspirational aspect of the soap, modelled on the American soap formula holds less appeal for local viewers than the reality aspect based on the British formula. The reason for this seems to be that the glamour portrayed on *Generations* does not measure up to the glamour depicted on soaps like *The Bold*. The students interviewed were of the opinion that the clothes and houses on *Generations* meant to be representative of the very wealthy do not compare with the lavish homes and beautiful designer clothes on *The Bold*. As far as the viewers interviewed were concerned, the reality-based part of the show does not live up to expectation either. Why then do they continue to watch? There was a level of identification with the characters on *Generations* despite the criticisms voiced by the interviewees. The interviews left me with the impression that the students were giving *Generations* a chance to prove itself, and that since it has been screened daily, their involvement has grown from one based on curiosity to one of more emotional involvement in the characters and their stories.

One thing which had a definite distancing effect with the students where *Generations* was concerned, was the fact that

the cast has changed drastically in the last few years, with only a few of the original characters remaining. The original core cast has all but disappeared. The opposite is true for *The Bold and the Beautiful*, whose core cast of characters has not altered since it first went on air in 1986. The students have quite literally grown up with the characters on the soap, and this establishes a powerful connection and sense of involvement and identification with the characters.

The overwhelming response received to the question 'why do you watch *Generations*?' was curiosity and the novelty of a local daily soap combined with identification with the characters. When the same question was posed with regard to *The Bold*, curiosity about the lives of the rich and powerful in America was part of the reason given for watching, as well as identification with the characters and the fact that many of them (particularly the male students) found it taught them about life and relationships. This last reason featured less prominently as an inducement for watching *Generations*.

The interview responses indicated that as far as the students were concerned, they could learn 'life lessons' from both soaps, particularly lessons on romantic relationships, although *The Bold* seemed to be more of an influence than *Generations*.

## Soaps and social realism

"Soap opera, like more 'serious' television drama, attempts to encompass the unpleasant and problematic aspects of our human relations" (Livingstone, 1990: 56). One of the main reasons soaps are so popular is that they deal with many of life's dilemmas and tribulations, be they financial, romantic or familial. This is partly what establishes emotional connections between viewers and the characters they are watching. More than any other television genre, soap operas create these attachments. They are able to do so for several reasons, the most notable being that they run daily and thus are part of the viewer's daily routine as well as the fact that they deal with human interactions, triumphs and joys. As Marie Gillespie puts it,

[T]he conventional western soap opera constructs a 'symbolic community', weaving together the everyday lives of its inhabitants in a fine web of intricate relationships between kin and neighbours, friends and enemies (Gillespie, 1995: 142).

The 'symbolic' soap opera community is much like any real life community or neighbourhood. Gillespie found that the Indian community in Southall in London amongst whom she was conducting research, is very similar to a soap opera community, given its close knit nature. Some media commentators have ascribed the popularity of the Australian soap in Britain to latent racism in British society,

claiming that what appeals to them is the exclusively white community portrayed in *Neighbours* (Gillespie, 1995). Gillespie's research was conducted in an Indian community in Britain whose residents are great fans of *Neighbours*, which refutes the claim that it is popular with only whites by virtue of the fact that it portrays an all white community. As Gillespie puts it,

But Southall's *Neighbours* fans evidently have compelling reasons for identifying with the soap's young protagonists, which override 'racial' differences. They draw on the soap as a cultural resource in their everyday interactions both in the peer culture and with parents and other adults, as they endeavour to construct new modes of identity for themselves (Gillespie, 1995:143).

The popularity of American soaps like *The Bold* and *Days of our Lives* with black South African audiences bears out the point made by Gillespie, that soaps transcend racial divisions. None of the students interviewed for this thesis said that the fact that *The Bold* has an almost exclusively white all-American cast in any way prevented them from identifying with the characters. The irony is (as mentioned earlier in this chapter) that the students seemed to find greater disparities between their own experiences and those of the characters on *Generations* (predominantly young black South Africans) than with those on *The Bold* with whom they



identified at an emotional level, not expecting or demanding any superficial similarities.

According to Sonia Livingstone

soap opera serves the same functions as cultural myths, connecting with basic human concerns, explaining complex social phenomena, providing categories for thought and moral precepts to live by" (Livingstone, 1990: 56).

This was illustrated in the interviews for this thesis, where the students commented on the fact that they learn how to behave in certain situations from what they see on *Generations* and *The Bold*.

Given the immense popularity that soap operas enjoy, they are perfect platform for transmitting important social information and messages. This is particularly true in the case of South Africa, where a large percentage of the population is illiterate, television provides an ideal vehicle for getting important messages across and for dispelling certain dangerous myths. Even though *Generations* is a soap opera aimed at entertainment, its producers have used this as a platform to inform their viewers. The young child infected with HIV on the show is a case in point. She is used as a means of educating the audience about the realities of the disease. Getting this kind of information to an audience (particularly a young one) is vital in a country where hideous myths like 'sleeping with a virgin

will cure AIDS' have been spread and have consequently led to an alarming increase in child rape.

Critics may regard the notion of soap operas containing latent social messages with suspicion and ridicule (Livingstone, 1990: 57), but their popularity cannot be denied and research like that conducted for this thesis has shown that viewers gain information and understanding from their favourite soaps despite what the detractors may say.

Given that soaps deal with the universal turmoils and triumphs of life, they have the potential to reach people the world over, bridging cultural, ethnic and racial divides in a way that few other television genres (with the exception of sport programmes) can do.

### **Talking about soaps: The Pleasure of Gossip**

A significant element of soap viewing enjoyment is the conversation which takes place around one's favourite soap opera. Hobson's study referred to earlier in this chapter noted how some people feel so excluded from conversations going on amongst their colleagues at work about a particular soap, that they feel pressure to start watching so as not to be left out.

The students interviewed for this thesis all commented on the fact that their favourite soaps are part of their daily conversation with friends and family. According to Hobson

"talking about television programmes and what has happened in them is essential in making a programme popular and part of the cultural capital of general discourse" (Hobson, 1994: 167). Even if one watches a soap alone, the moment that it is discussed it becomes a collective activity, even if the actual viewing is done in isolation. Gillespie asserts that

talk about their viewing allows for the negotiation of what is and what ought to be both in their own social lives and in the soap world. It involves both realism and fantasy and is centrally focussed on questions of morality. These negotiations are partly facilitated by the continuous soap text which refuses closure and allows viewers to adopt a wandering point of view....It is precisely because viewing and discussing *Neighbours* is a socially shared act and experience that young people can draw upon it collectively to make sense of their own lives (Gillespie, 1995: 149).

The point that Gillespie makes about soaps allowing young people to make sense of their own lives through the experience of watching and talking about them with their peers, was borne out by the students interviewed for this thesis. During the course of the interviews it became clear that the soaps allowed the students to broach and discuss topics that they may not have been able to do directly. For example, the rape of a character on *Generations* caused some

heated debate during one of the viewing sessions. One female student related the story of a cousin of hers who was raped and the girls in the group discussed the attitudes of their respective communities to the act of rape.

The students also said that soaps provided insight into the turbulent nature of romantic relationships. The male students in particular commented on how soaps provide them with access to the workings of the female psyche. The same kinds of topics dominated the discussions of Gillespie's subjects "[T]hree thematic areas dominate in young people's talk about their viewing: family and kinship relations; romance and courtship rituals; and neighbourly relations in the 'community' (Gillespie, 1995: 149).

Gillespie notes the fact that the Southall teenagers she interviewed recognised not only the similarities between their world and that of *Neighbours*, but also the differences (Gillespie, 1995: 149). The same is true of the students interviewed for this study. The relationships that Brooke Logan has had with the men in the Forester family on *The Bold* was raised by many of the informants as something that would not readily happen or be tolerated in their communities.

The fact that Brooke was married to a father and his son and has children by her marriage to the father would be seen as perverse by their communities. Even though many of

the students liked Brooke and sympathised with her romantic predicaments, they admitted that her entanglements were not something they had encountered in their own lived experience. This did not however stop them from sympathising or identifying with what she had to go through. As Gillespie says in the following:

In exploring these [romantic, familial, communal] relationships in *Neighbours* and contrasting the forms they take with their own experience, young people are actively and creatively negotiating the most important sources of social tensions in their lives. Within and across these domains, they are exploring generational, gender and cultural differences (Gillespie, 1995: 149).

Gossip is conventionally seen as something negative and destructive. In the case of soap opera gossip generated amongst viewers, it can often be something positive, allowing for the negotiations described by Gillespie to take place.

### **The 'hermeneutic circle' of understanding**

Tony Wilson writes that viewers speculate on possible meanings of a text and revise or reject their own speculations as they watch (Wilson, 1993: 51). In the case of the students I interviewed, they all indicated that their knowledge of what a soap is comes from their viewing

of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *The Days of our Lives*<sup>1</sup>. They use their knowledge of soaps to make sense of *Generations*, which, as mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, is referred to as a 'local *Bold*'.

Part of the appeal of soaps as discussed in this chapter is the process of speculating what will happen based on one's knowledge of the genre. With soaps the pleasure derived from speculation is that there are a limited number of possibilities. Based on their knowledge of soaps, viewers will speculate over *which* possibility will occur. As Wilson points out

Projections of possible programme content and the viewer's concern with their truth produce the to and fro movement, the play of meaning across the processes of a text. This is the 'hermeneutic circle' of understanding a programme by relating part to whole in a fundamentally rational speculation about meaning (Wilson, 1993: 51).

The speculation undertaken by soap viewers is informed, it is not random. Conjecture of this nature proved to be a major part of the pleasure involved in viewing *Generations* and *The Bold* for the students, as evidenced in the following extract from an interview with a female student called S'bongile.

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<sup>1</sup> An American soap opera screened on SABC1.

Michele: When you are watching *Generations* what kind of things do you talk about?

S'bongile: We talk about the characters and what is going on. We discuss what will happen next, like what Ntsiki will do next and whether Glen and Karabo will get back together, things like that.

Most of the students gave similar kinds of responses to this question in relation to both *The Bold* and *Generations*. As Wilson puts it, the pleasures they derive from viewing are "those of the 'detection' of meaning, the achievement of a *gestalt* of satisfying intelligibility centred on understanding the programme's description and narration of events" (Wilson, 1993: 51).

The students revealed in the interviews that a great deal of the conversations they have about *Generations* and *The Bold* revolve around discussing what will possibly happen next, and they spend time inventing possible outcomes, often with a certain bias towards their favourite characters.

While conversation around soaps is an integral part of viewing pleasure, David Morley points out that viewers know the difference between reality and the fiction of the soap world in which they are engrossed, even though they may speak about characters as if they were 'real' people. Conversation while watching television "sustains the movement back and forth between involvement and detachment...

it sustains involvement and identification (in varying degrees of intensity) with what is on the screen" (Wilson, 1993: 53)<sup>2</sup>.

Charlotte Brunsdon notes that the circulation of soap opera related 'news' to the public in the form of magazines and articles in the general press can increase the pleasure of hermeneutic speculation, "as it increases the constraints in play. The viewer has to juggle all the different sorts of knowledge to get it right" (Brunsdon, 1984: 83). South African magazines such as *True Love*, a monthly women's magazine aimed at Black women readers, provide a breakdown of the month's episodes of *Generations*, *Isidingo*, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *The Days of our Lives*. In addition, the magazine also features articles on the soap actors.

According to Brunsdon, accessing information about soap actors does not lessen the emotional attachment viewers have to the characters they play. On the contrary, she asserts that the "knowledge you have about particular characters 'in real life' feeds into and inflects the pleasure of soap watching" (Brunsdon, 1984: 83). While this is certainly true, an interesting dynamic came out of the interviews with the students. As a result of the fact that they were familiar with some of the actors in the *Generations* cast, they struggled to remember character names and could only remember the name of the actor in the role.

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<sup>2</sup> Morley quoted in Wilson, 1993: 52.



This serves as an indicator that the suspension of disbelief is not always present in their viewing of *Generations*, as they seemed to identify the character by the actor and not the other way around. In the case of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, not one of the forty students I interviewed referred to a character by the name of the actor in the role. There is no barrier to their identification and emotional involvement with the fictional characters on *The Bold*, as they know the actors only in the roles they play on the soap - they are not familiar in any other context. They exist for the students only in the fictional universe of the soap opera, which serves to enhance the suspension of disbelief.

Liebes and Katz in their study on audiences who watched *Dallas*, note the fact that the informants (particularly the American groups) they interviewed commented on the 'naturalness' of the characters [in *Dallas*]. It is the awareness that the characters are acting 'themselves' - that makes it very difficult to separate character from actor in the ubiquitous genre of soap opera (Liebes and Katz, 1993).

#### **The viewing context: the residence television room**

Due to the communal viewing environment of the residences the students indicated that a great deal of soap talk goes on while the soaps are being watched. It is this communal atmosphere which makes their viewing experience unique.

Most of the studies examined for this thesis focused on the discussions around soaps which take place *after* soaps have been watched, as frequently viewers watched alone or with one or two family members. For the students I interviewed, the actual act of watching was a social activity. Marie Gillespie discusses the social aspects of viewing in the viewing patterns of the Punjabi families she interviewed. She points out the following with reference to the viewing of Indian films in the homes of the families she interviewed.

In spite of this repeatedly expressed reluctance, among boys, to view Indian films, the screen's ability to serve social interaction in the family tends to override individual preferences.....What might be seen as 'enforced' or 'reluctant' viewing can nevertheless take on pleasurable connotations where the emphasis is on the family's 'being together'. (Gillespie, 1995: 81)

In many respects the communal environment of the residence television where the students I interviewed watch *The Bold and Generations* is like a family viewing context. Choices have to be made about what will be watched and majority vote rules. All the students commented on the fact that when these two soaps are on, there is no possibility of watching anything else. Having said this, the act of viewing *The Bold and Generations* becomes a social activity where friends can interact with one another, much like the

familial interaction described by Gillespie. The students interviewed indicated that the communal viewing facility provided them with an opportunity to watch their favourite soaps and interact with friends at the same time. In general discussion with the students outside of the interview structure it became evident that many of them did not watch *The Bold and Generations* by themselves even when in their own homes. Invariably they watched with family, friends or neighbours or all three, so the communal viewing environment in their residences was not something to which they had to adjust.

What made the viewing context specifically interesting is the fact that, traditionally, watching soaps has been described by researchers as a solitary activity engaged in by lone viewers to fend off loneliness and isolation, hence the focus on parasocial relationships in soap audience research (discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). In the case of the students I interviewed, the act of viewing is a social activity engaged in by a large group of people.

### **Watching and talking**

'Soap talk' is central to viewing pleasure, as has been established in many studies into soap opera audiences, but the focus of such studies has generally been around the talk that takes place *after* viewing, with friends and colleagues. In the case of the students, the conversation

was spontaneous and immediate, as it took place while watching. As Morley notes "audience conversation while watching television sustains the movement back and forth between involvement and detachment" (Morley in Wilson, 1993: 53).

Conversation while watching as engaged in by the students, heightens the intensity of involvement, as they engage in arguments with one another about what will happen next and which characters will emerge triumphant. In its most intense form, identification with a specific character creates a complete suspension of disbelief. In their defense of Brooke for example, some of the students became so engrossed in justifying her behaviour, that it was as if they were talking about a 'real' person. The point is though, that while watching or engaging in discussions about Brooke, she is for all intents and purposes 'real'. She is a person who is a daily part of their lives and has been for more than a decade.

A "process of shifting into and out of the fictional world of the programme" is typical in viewers' conversations about their favourite soaps (Buckingham in Wilson: 1993: 65).<sup>3</sup> The same pattern was evident in the conversations of the students. They combined talk about soap characters and storylines with anecdotes from their own experiences. The social nature of the reading situation of the viewers plays

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<sup>3</sup> Buckingham is quoted in Wilson with reference to the work that he conducted into audiences of the British soap opera, *Eastenders*.

a role in the way they interpret the soaps. For example, sometimes contentious issues such as AIDS (*Generations*) and rape (*The Bold and the Beautiful*) and teenage pregnancy (*The Bold and the Beautiful*) are raised in the context of a soap and the discussions which arise out of these issues amongst the students help them process the information they are receiving from the soap.

### **Viewers occupy roles in the act of viewing**

Tony Wilson comments on the fact that viewers often occupy the role of 'investigator' when watching television or film, especially in the detective and mystery genre (Wilson, 1993: 55). As discussed earlier in this chapter, the soap viewer engages in a different kind of 'investigation', because there are limited possibilities of how things can resolve themselves in the world of soap opera. In addition to the role of 'investigator', the soap viewer also fills the role of 'friend' to the characters on soaps, as the characters reveal so much about themselves over a period of years, that the viewer is made to feel like they know them intimately. The vehemence with which the students defended their favourite characters on *Generations* and particularly *The Bold and the Beautiful*, served to illustrate the attachment they have to certain characters. The same degree of emotional involvement was not evident in their answers to questions on *Generations*. An illustrative example of this is in the following extract from an interview with a female student called Portia, who

watched both *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* four to five times a week. I chose Portia's interview as an example given that in terms of viewing time, she watches both equally frequently which would *imply* the same level of involvement with both.

Michele: When watching *The Bold and the Beautiful* do you ever talk while it is on?

Portia: Yea we talk.

Michele: What kind of things do you talk about?

Portia: You just get angry or you feel sorry for someone. It can get personal.

Michele: What do you mean by 'personal'? Do people take sides?

Portia: Yes. We stand up for our favourite characters! Also, sometimes we start talking about a person in our lives who's maybe going through something like what is happening on *The Bold*. If a story is really exciting then we keep quiet and concentrate.

Michele: Do you talk when watching *Generations*? If so, what do you talk about?

Portia: With *Generations* it's different, it's not as emotional as *The Bold*. Sometimes we talk about what we think might happen next.

What Portia's responses illustrate, is that the amount of time spent viewing a programme is no indicator of the emotional involvement of the viewer. Though some students indicated that they *do* talk during *Generations* about the

same things they would talk about during *The Bold*, the overall impression the interviews left me with, is that there is a greater sense of emotional involvement with the characters on *The Bold* than the characters on *Generations*.

### **Identification and establishment of intimacy**

Identification with characters is an important part of the pleasure derived from soap opera viewing.

To identify with a character is always to identify with him or her under a certain description, the description of a textually articulated social role: detective, father, adventurer and so on (Wilson, 1993: 55).

The interviews I conducted with the students revealed that this kind of identification has nothing to do with superficial similarities like looks, race etc. but rather it has to do with the traits of a specific character. The character of Stephanie Forester is interesting in this regard. The students either loved or hated her, and they mostly expressed their feelings in terms of their relationships with their own mothers. Hlengiwe, a male student, said that he would not like his mother to interfere in his relationships the way that Stephanie does with her sons, particularly Ridge. Hlengiwe also felt that the fact that Stephanie interferes less in Thorne's love life is an indication that she loves him less than Ridge.

He was clearly judging her behaviour based on his own notions of mother/son dynamics. As Farrel Corcoran notes

Television, then, seems to reduce the distance between itself and its viewers, weaving a space/time continuum in which spectator and personality share a common universe of experience. Its structure of intimacy creates even the illusion that the powerful members of our society.... disclose themselves to us in an intimate, familiar, amiable way (Corcoran, 1987: 541).

Corcoran's analysis of the television viewing experience is especially accurate where soap operas are concerned, as the intimate structure of soaps, and their focus on human relationships and interaction, allows them to cross all conceivable barriers, from race to gender to culture to language. The very nature of television viewing is personal - it is watched in the home or a similar domestic space, which immediately lessens the sense of distance between the viewer and the characters on the screen - they literally enter the viewer's living space.

One of the key questions I asked the students I interviewed, was whether it made a difference to them that the characters in *The Bold and the Beautiful* are white Americans, seemingly removed from their own lived experiences. All forty of the students said in their interviews that it made no difference to them whatsoever, which serves as an indicator of the power of soap opera to



disguise real disparities between social and cultural groups. The following interview extracts serve to highlight this.

Michele: Does the fact that the majority of characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* are white Americans living in Los Angeles, stop you from identifying with the characters?

Fred: Not necessarily. It doesn't really matter whether they are South African or not, people are pretty much the same.

Sibusiso: I think people are people, it doesn't matter where they live, even though the place you live in will influence you in one way or another.

Leslie: To me it doesn't make a difference.

Mpume: They [*Generations* and *The Bold*] have the same story. There is always something to relate to.

The conversations in which the students engaged about *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* revealed the nature of identification they felt for various characters. Archie Moroka (*Generations*) and Ridge and Eric Forester (*The Bold and the Beautiful*) captured the imaginations of the male students for similar reasons. All three were admired for their success in business and their lifestyles. The nature of identification was that the male students wished to emulate them in their own lives - become like them, accomplish the same things.

All the conventions of soap opera are at play in creating a sense of closeness between viewers and characters. The close-up shots synonymous with soaps are one way in which this intimacy is established, as they provide "optimal conditions for disclosure of the privateness of character" (Corcoran, 1987: 541). All the students commented on the fact that they felt emotionally involved with the characters on either *The Bold* or *Generations* or both, although more showed a stronger sense of identification with *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

As Bernard Timberg points out, the connection between viewer and character on a soap centres on the way in which the camera presents the story to the viewer. In a sense the nature of the formulaic close-up shots associated with soaps positions the camera as the narrator, "it brings the viewer into and out of the soap opera world and guide[s] the viewer through that world" (Timberg, 1987: 165). This kind of technique or device is so taken for granted, that it "escapes our conscious notice while shaping our unconscious response" as viewers (Timberg, 1987: 166).

### **The use of stereotypes in soap operas**

Livingstone discusses the use of stereotypes in soap operas, particularly in relation to the genre's stereotyping of women. Soaps tend to portray specific 'types' of women and these representations tend to support the status quo. For example, soaps tend to glorify women

who are dedicated to their families rather than their careers. Moral judgements are offered for actions "so that the 'good' women are family orientated, non-sexual, and place their careers second, while the 'bad' women are openly seductive, use sex as a weapon, and are often punished for pursuing their careers by unwanted pregnancies (Livingstone, 1990: 58).

This kind of stereotyping is clear on *The Bold*. Dr. Taylor Hayes is a psychiatrist who has given up her practice to raise her three children. She is portrayed as sensitive, caring and understanding, and she got the man of her dreams, Ridge Forester. Brooke Logan's character is the antithesis of Taylor's. She is the head of an international fashion house. Although she also has children, she has pursued a career. She is presented as manipulative and ruthless. Ridge was also the man of her dreams, but she lost him to Taylor (more than once). Even though Brooke has achieved immense success professionally, she is seen to be unfulfilled and lonely, the implication being, that she has to pay the price for prioritising her career over family.

The way Brooke has risen in her career is implicitly judged by the reactions of other characters on the soap, like the Forester family matriarch, Stephanie, who has done everything in her power to get Brooke out of the lives of her sons and ex-husband, to whom Brooke was married and with whom she has two children. Even though Brooke loves her children, she has used them to obtain what she wants

from the Forester men. Stephanie regularly accuses Brooke of using her feminine wiles to gain control of Forester Creations. This may be partially true, but Brooke was responsible for the development and patenting of a 'miracle' fabric which saved Forester Creations from financial ruin. This fact is almost never referred to however.

Brooke's character points to a contradiction which is inherent in most soaps. The disparity is as follows: even though soaps portray professional career women who are powerful, wealthy and successful, these women are almost always villainous in some way. In addition to being vilified, they are also often lonely or in search of love which they can never quite obtain because of who they are. Consequently, even though soaps portray professional career women, they are always in some way unfulfilled. Taylor on the other hand, has put her career second to the interests of her family, and she is portrayed as being far more content and happy than Brooke in most instances.

The interviews with the students revealed that even if they did not like Taylor, they could not really say anything bad about her either. With Brooke, on the other hand, it was a case of love or hate. Those who said they liked her tended to pity her as well. Those who disliked her were extremely outspoken in their criticism of her. Maphunye said she felt for both Taylor and Brooke in their tussle for Ridge.

Michele: Who is your favorite character(s) on *The Bold*?

Maphunye: Stephanie, because she is a good mother. Children should listen to their parent. Even their pace of life is faster, parents have experience that the children can learn from. Stephanie is very involved with her children, especially Ridge, which is why Brooke has so many problems in her relationship with him - Stephanie hates her. I like Brooke though - I feel sorry for her because she is so in love with Ridge. I also feel sorry for Taylor because she also loves Ridge (and Stephanie likes her), but I think deep down she knows that Ridge really loves Brooke<sup>4</sup>.

Stereotypes form the basis of soap opera's appeal (Livingstone: 1990: 57). Yet, argues Livingstone,

Soap opera is absorbing human drama, and consequently the stereotypes and moral judgements are fairly subtle and not always obvious at first glance. While stereotypes are often to be found underneath, on the surface exists the wealth of personal details that viewers find satisfying and which contribute to their view of characters as 'like real people'..... (Livingstone, 1990: 58).

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<sup>4</sup> This is Maphunye's opinion on the situation. As the soap has evolved since his interview was recorded, Taylor and Ridge are happily married. Ridge rejected all of Brooke's attempts to win him back.

What Livingstone says was evident in the student interviews conducted for this thesis. The responses of those who liked Brooke illustrated the complexity of her character. They saw her as misguided and/or misunderstood, which shows that she is not a one-dimensional character. Though she may superficially appear to be the stereotypical 'slut' who will resort to whatever licentious behaviour she deems necessary to get what she wants, she is not without feelings. She loves her children and is genuinely looking for love and companionship, even though she may not always go about it the right way. The love and affection she feels for her children, Rick and Brigitte, is evidenced in her fierce efforts to protect them and keep them safe. Her attempts at acquiring a husband are often in part motivated by her desire for her offspring to have a father figure living with them.

The perceived stereotypical characters in soaps are belied by the way viewers devote themselves to following the lives of their favourite characters in much the same way as they would those of close personal friends. "After watching the same programme for years if not decades, the accumulating histories and interactions of the characters are bound to complicate any simple or stereotyped perceptions" (Livingstone, 1990: 58).

## Viewing of soaps and loneliness

The most striking difference between soap opera audience studies conducted in Europe and America, is the viewing context. Much of the research done on those continents reveals that soap viewing is often a solitary activity. Even when people are not living alone, they often partake of their favorite soap on their own. Many researchers have revealed that soap opera viewing is an activity which wards off loneliness, and is engaged in by people who are lonely. The relationships these viewers enter into with their favourite soap characters act as a substitute for real human interaction. John Tulloch noted this phenomenon in his study of elderly soap opera audiences. The elderly he interviewed showed a keen interest in being interviewed. According to Tulloch they are:

Isolated in small domestic units, have fewer opportunities for group conversation about their favorite shows, and (when confident about the interviewer) will want to talk (often during the show you are watching with them). Often they will call the interviewer back later on to say something they had forgotten to say on the first occasion (Tulloch, 1994, 180).

The aged viewers also displayed a tendency of writing to the producers of shows to let them know which aspects of the soaps they liked and which they wanted changed. It

appears as though this letter writing takes on the form of a dialogue which serves as a substitute for real conversation. The letters reviewed by Tulloch reveal that these viewers often tell the producers about themselves, as evidenced in the following extract from one of these letters:

I get lonely as I've been alone now for 9 years. My darling died very quickly aged 57 and he knew how I loved the TV although he was a radio ham enthusiast in touch with many countries and radio stations. Must finish off now, as I'm apt to go on and on (even talk to myself). I'm happy to see you all and thought I'd let you know. (Tulloch, 1994: 181).

The students I interviewed did not reveal that they partake in this kind of activity. The analysis and discussion of their shows is enjoyed by them with their friends and the people they watch with. For them it is not about stemming the tide of loneliness.

In a paper entitled "Chronic Loneliness and Television Use", Elizabeth Perse and Alan Rubin explore the connection between chronic loneliness and increased television viewing. They provide the following definition of loneliness:



Loneliness is "the unpleasant experience that occurs when a person's network of social relations is deficient in some important way" (Perlman & Peplau, 1981: p.31). Loneliness is not necessarily a result of social isolation. Instead, loneliness grows out of a cognitive appraisal that the quantity and quality of social interaction is deficient (Peplau, Russell, & Heim, 1979 as quoted by Perse and Rubin, 1990: 38)

Perse and Rubin comment on the fact that the need for social interaction is basic in humans. When this need cannot be fulfilled in 'natural' or 'normal' ways, "people turn to media" (Perse & Rubin, 1990: 39). Using the media as a substitute for actual human interaction has been documented in various studies, with particular reference to soap opera viewers. Perse and Rubin tested this hypothesis in their study . They concluded that "chronic loneliness reflects greater 'Pass Time' soap opera viewing motivation, reduced 'Exciting Entertainment' and 'Social Utility'<sup>5</sup> viewing motivation, and perceiving soap opera to be more realistic" (Perse & Rubin, 1990: 47). Instead of focusing on the elderly, the sample analysed consisted of 460 undergraduate students at a large Midwestern university, who each completed a self- administered questionnaire. 71,3% of the respondents reported that they watch daytime soaps

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<sup>5</sup> Motivations for viewing as defined by Perse and Rubin (1990)

though analysis of the sample only partially supported their hypothesis (Perse & Rubin, 1990).

A striking fact which emerged from the interviews for this study which stands out in sharp contrast to Perse and Rubin's paper, is that none of the respondents interviewed cited loneliness as a motivation for their viewing of either *The Bold and the Beautiful* or *Generations*. With the latter, curiosity was the major reason given for viewing. watching because they were curious to see what a South Their major points of comparison were *The Bold* and *Days of Our Lives*. Once they started watching however, most indicated that they continued to watch because they had become involved with the lives of the characters.

The predominant reason for watching *The Bold* given by respondents was a desire to see another culture and way of life and also there was a large proportion of students who said that they watched the soap in order to learn about romance and relationships. Many of the male informants said that it taught them how to treat women. The word 'educational' kept on coming up in the interviews with reference to *The Bold*, whereas it never came up with reference to *Generations*.

### **Soaps and the creation of parasocial relationships**

Pekka Isotalus conducted research into the parasocial relationships formed between viewers of soap operas and

their favourite characters and viewers of news and their best-liked newscasters. Isotalus provides the following definitions of a parasocial relationship:

Parasocial relationship has been referred to as an illusion of a face-to-face relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1986), as an illusion of an interpersonal relationship (Watson & Hill, 1984), as media simulated interpersonal communication (Cathgart & Gumpert 1983), as pseudo-interaction (Hanson 1988), as an imaginary social relationship (Alperstein 1991), as having a quasi-friend (Koenig & Lessan 1985), or as pseudo-friendship (Perse 1990)...To sum up, parasocial relationship can be taken to indicate the receivers' imaginary relationship with a given media personality. (Isotalus:1995:59)

*The Bold and the Beautiful* is enormously popular in Finland. "Finnish viewers took a fancy to *The Bold and the Beautiful* with a force that resembled a national movement" (Isotalus:1995:59). According to Isotalus, the relationship between Finnish viewers and *The Bold* and its characters is an affective one.

Together with the characters, the viewers experience the joys and sorrows of their life, and they eagerly expect to know their latest news. Sometimes the viewers seem

unable to distinguish an actor from his or her role (Isotalus, 1995: 59).

The kind of affective relationship described by Isotalus is true of the South African students interviewed for this study. The interviews revealed an intense involvement with the lives of the characters in both *The Bold* and *Generations*.

The fact that the actors on *Generations* were familiar to the students from other shows and dramas appeared to lessen the parasocial nature of the relationship between the viewers and characters on the soap, whereas the fact that the actors on *The Bold* were one with the characters they portrayed on the soap (in the minds of the viewers) seemed to increase the affective relationship between the viewers and their favourite characters.

There are definite similarities between the viewership of *The Bold* in Finland as described by Isotalus and that of the South African students interviewed for this thesis. In both countries the soap is enormously popular (in S.A. it continues to be on the top ten list of most popular shows on the SABC, see audience figures in Chapter 4) and has penetrated the national consciousness.

One of the male students interviewed for this thesis said that he arranged an intimate dinner in his residence room for him and his girlfriend based on something he saw one of

the male characters do on *The Bold*, in the hopes that he would achieve the same successful result as the character on the show. This illustrates an element of parasocial behaviour described by Sonia Livingstone in her book entitled *Making Sense of Television: The Psychology of audience interpretation* (1990) in which she points to the variability in the nature of the relationship between text and viewer. She states the following:

Viewers may identify with particular characters, seeing themselves as in that characters shoes; they may regard a character as a role model, imitating that character's behaviour in order to gain some of the rewards which the character is shown to enjoy... (Livingstone, 1990: 22).

Another aspect of the parasocial nature of the television viewing experience referred to by Livingstone is one in which a viewer "may recognise aspects of a character as similar to a significant person in their own lives, engaging in what Horton and Wohl (1956) term 'parasocial interaction'" (Livingstone, 1990 : 22). This kind of relationship featured strikingly in the interviews with the students conducted for this thesis. One of the questions put to them in the interviews was whether or not they knew anyone in their own lives who reminded them of any of the characters on *Generations* or *The Bold*. Many of the girls said that Brooke Logan on *The Bold* reminded them of girls they knew who would go out of their way to steal someone

else's boyfriend. One female student called Nomandla, for example, said that she had a relative who reminded her of Taylor Forester on *The Bold*, as this person was kind and loving just like Taylor.

Michele: Do you know anyone in your life who reminds you of any of the characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Nomandla: Yes. Taylor reminds me of my mom, she is also kind and caring like Taylor.

A male student called Rush identified strongly with Ridge from *The Bold and the Beautiful* because of his success with women. He said he had a neighbour who reminded him of Ridge, and whose behaviour he tried to emulate.

This kind of identification is an important part of the soap viewing experience which augments the pleasure derived from watching.

### **How *Dallas* captured the global imagination**

One of the main questions this thesis attempts to answer is why is *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American soap, so popular with a young black South African audience? Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz in their study on the global appeal of the American prime time soap, *Dallas*, grapple with similar questions. They make the point that American popular culture "travels the world with ease" (Liebes and

Katz, 1993: 3), but their mission was to understand specifically how a show like *Dallas* is so universally understandable. Or is it?

During its original run on television (it is re-run on networks all over the world) it was the most popular programme in the world. Ien Ang counted ninety countries in which the show was a success. *Dallas* failed in only a few places, most notably Brazil and Japan (Liebes and Katz, 1993). *The Bold* is viewed in over eighty countries. Even though *Dallas* is classified as a 'prime time' soap (refer to Chapter 7 for definitions) as opposed to a 'daytime' soap like *The Bold* and *Generations*, it became evident during the interviews I conducted that the research conducted by Liebes and Katz (and others) on the '*Dallas* phenomenon' revealed similar facts to those unearthed in my conversations with the students on *The Bold* and *Generations*.

Leibes and Katz dealt specifically with the notable popularity of *Dallas* in Israel. They gathered small groups of family and friends, each group consisting of three married couples of similar age, education and ethnicity. The groups were made up of "Israeli Arabs, newly arrived Russian Jews, veteran Moroccan settlers, and members of kibbutzim (typically second generation Israelis). There were forty-four of these groups altogether (Leibes and Katz, 1993: 6). The Israeli groups were matched with ten groups of second generation Americans in the Los Angeles

area so that the Israeli readings could be compared with those who share the producers' culture.

At a later date eleven Japanese groups were selected and interviewed in the same way. Because *Dallas* failed in Japan, and the Americans were two seasons of episodes ahead of the Israelis, the interviewees from both these countries were shown videotapes of the same episodes viewed by the Israeli groups (Leibes and Katz, 1993: 6). Altogether the study refers to the ways in which *Dallas* was read in six different cultural communities (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 23).

What makes Leibes and Katz's research so valuable is their analysis of not only what made *Dallas* so popular, but also why it failed in certain countries and why an American prime time soap was so incredibly popular in so many countries. Leibes and Katz assert that

The ethnic composition of Israel provided an opportunity to examine [their] assumption that meaning emerges from negotiation, that is, that understanding, interpretation, and involvement vary as a function of the interaction between the symbolic resources of the viewer and the symbolic offerings of the text (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 6).

The interviews I conducted for this thesis serve as an illustration of the above. The way the students interpreted *The Bold* and *Generations* was influenced by their



backgrounds, culture and lived experience, which makes their negotiated reading of the text specific to them.

Liebes and Katz take heed the fact that the type of involvement generated by *Dallas* "may result, paradoxically, from the fact that it is not considered serious artistically and, perhaps, also because of its perceived distance from viewers' reality" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16). They note, by way of example, a study conducted in Denmark on *Dallas* amongst viewers from the middle and working classes. Hjort, the researcher, found that *Dallas* "allows the expression of emotions like love and hate in a liminal context, removed from one's life to neutral ground" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16). Hjort simultaneously examined a Danish series called *Daughters of the War*, which was regarded by viewers as more realistic and was therefore more likely to invoke critical reaction both about the accuracy of its reality and about its artistic quality (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16). As Liebes and Katz point out

An increasing number of countries are producing their own serials... and it is, therefore, of interest that such local productions may be more likely to be judged in terms of their reality than imported programs from which viewers feel more culturally distant. This does not mean [however] that the local program is necessarily perceived as more real. . . (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16).

The more traditional Israelis interviewed by Liebes and Katz took for granted the fact that *Dallas* revealed America or the rich or modern world. "In other words, cultural distance reduces the preoccupation with the question of reality, and proximity causes viewers to measure critically how real it really is" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 16). This was clearly evident in my interviews, where students were more critical of the realism in *Generations*, a local production than they were of the 'reality' portrayed in *The Bold*. With the American soap, their connection was with the universal emotions elicited in them by the characters and identification with the situations the characters were in, whereas with *Generations* there was an additional element of criticism based on their own lived experience.

The students were happy to accept situations in *The Bold* which they would not have done in *Generations*, which is supposed to reflect their own reality. For example, many of the students commented on the fact that Brooke on *The Bold* has been romantically involved with every man in the Forester family, namely Eric and his two sons, something which would not be tolerated in their culture. They were not however doubting the plausibility of this happening in America, as they have no first hand experience with American culture. Had the same thing been tried on *Generations*, it would have come under heavy criticism. As it is, the relationship between Archie Moroka, his wife and her twin sister, was difficult for the students to accept.

Zoleka was unable to conceive and she got her twin to sleep with Archie in the hope that she would conceive and Archie would never know. The students felt this was highly implausible and were extremely critical of this particular storyline. The criticism of local productions evidenced in the interviews is explored in greater detail earlier in this chapter.

The students I interviewed were able to distance themselves from the sometimes morally reprehensible behaviour of the characters on *The Bold* by virtue of the fact that the characters are American and therefore foreign and to be judged by different standards. In one sense, this enhanced the escapist nature of the soap viewing experience. *Generations* seemed to fill less of an escapist function in the sense that while watching, the students were comparing the events on the show to their experiences of life in South Africa, bringing in a far greater element of judgement of realism than in the case of *The Bold*.

Katz and Liebes noted a similar phenomenon in their study on *Dallas*

Some groups find positive value in the program, even though they know that it is morally rotten. The Moroccan group 20, for example, finds the program morally outrageous but consoles itself in the escapist function (helps us forget Lebanon, poor housing, etc.), the safely distant glamour

of the program, as well as the moral opposition which it mobilizes (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 83).

It is far easier to escape into a glamorous world away from your own stresses and dilemmas, which is superficially entirely removed from your reality. That is what the escapist function of soap opera is all about. Glamour is not the only thing that provides an escape for viewers. The British soap operas tend to focus on working class rather than wealthy, glamorous people, but they still provide an escape. *Generations*, which is a hybrid of the American and British soap formulas (see chapter on production for more detail) also performs the escapist function. The key is that viewers can retreat into a world other than their own, and focus on the problems of the characters they are watching, rather than on their own.

### **Ien Ang on *Dallas***

I discuss Ang's research from a methodological point of view in Chapter 5. For the purposes of *this* chapter however, I would like to examine Ang's perspective on the nature of the soap viewer. Like Liebes and Katz, Ang comments on the fact that the arbiters of national culture frown upon the popularity enjoyed by American soaps like *Dallas*. They find the susceptibility of non-American audiences to such shows disturbing as they threaten a nation's cultural identity (Ang, 1985: 3). Popularity is "an extremely complicated phenomenon. No simple answer is

possible on the question of why *Dallas* is (was) so popular" (Ang, 1985: 5). Given the complex nature of popularity, Ang chose to focus on one aspect, namely pleasure, and the way in which the soap is received and consumed. According to Ang, it is "in the actual confrontation between viewer and programme that pleasure is primarily generated (Ang, 1985: 6-10). Ang makes many salient points in her book, but the one which was most fascinating in the context of my thesis, is as follows:

Pierre Bourdieu has explained that popular pleasure is characterized by an immediate emotional or sensual involvement in the object of pleasure. What matters is the possibility of identifying oneself with it in some way or other, to integrate it into everyday life. In other words, popular pleasure is first and foremost a pleasure of recognition (Ang, 1985: 20, quoting from P. Bourdieu, *The aristocracy of culture*, 1980: 225-254).

Ang touches (in the above) on the essence of why American soaps are able to cross so many cultural divides and have been so immensely popular worldwide. What she says is as applicable to daytime as it is to prime time soaps, as both genres have achieved enormous popularity in non-American countries. The reason the students I interviewed enjoy watching *The Bold* is because they are able to identify and relate to the characters. They were obviously not looking

at external similarities, but rather at personality types and character traits.

**"What makes viewers diverge when interpreting narrative?"  
(Livingstone, 1995: 174)**

Sonia Livingstone asks this question in her examination of the psychology of audience interpretation, and it is a question which is pertinent for this thesis. Why do viewers from different parts of the world interpret soap narratives differently? More importantly, why do individuals from the same cultural background and context relate differently to soaps? Given that we are all individuals with our own unique perspective on the world, it makes sense that we would relate to a text and its characters differently.

In the same way that individuals respond differently to people and situations in their lives, so too do they react diversely to soap characters and narratives. Livingstone quotes Noble (1975) who argues that "viewers interpret narratives through a process of recognition, entering into the action by playing against a character who is similar to someone they know in real life" (Livingstone, 1995: 175).

The soap opera viewer has always been the subject of ridicule in both academic and non-academic circles, characterised as a mindless dupe unable to distinguish clearly between the excesses of his/her favorite soaps and reality. It is only in recent years that researchers have

begun to acknowledge the sagacity of the soap viewer as an individual actively involved in the viewing process, with an intrinsic understanding of how the genre works.

The following chapter chronicles traditional quantitative methods of audience measurement.

## Chapter 4

### INSTITUTIONAL AUDIENCE MEASUREMENT

*We are all, in our heads, several different audiences at once, and can be constituted as such by different programmes. We have the capacity to deploy different levels and modes of attention, to mobilize different competencies in our viewing. At different times of the day, for different family members, different patterns of viewing have different 'saliences'. Here the monolithic conceptions of the viewer, the audience or of television itself have been displaced - one hopes forever - before the new emphasis on difference and variation (Hall, 1986: 10).*

This chapter will examine quantitative research practices with particular reference to audience ratings systems employed by broadcasters in America, and the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) in South Africa, in relation to the qualitative methods examined in previous chapters.

Institutional audience measurement is defined by the fact that its main purpose is to provide audience figures - it has no interest in the way programmes are watched, it is simply concerned with *how many* people are sitting in front of a television set while specific programmes are broadcast, so it provides no information on how programmes are interpreted by viewers.



Ien Ang states that the nature of commercial broadcasting in America needs to be examined in order to understand why the practice of audience measurement plays such a central role in the commercial broadcasting environment (Ang, 1997: 249). Shows live or die by their audience ratings - if ratings drop, shows are cancelled. The primary reason for the focus on ratings is one of economics. The commercial broadcasters rely on advertising revenue for their survival. It stands to reason that the shows with the highest audience ratings will attract the most advertising revenue, as they will give advertisers a chance to deliver their messages to the biggest possible audience in order to increase the sale of the products or services they are promoting. As Ang points out

In economic terms, production for profit is the sole objective of the commercial broadcasting industry. . . . To finance the whole system; the networks are dependent on advertisers as sponsors. The idea of advertising is principally based on the assumption that it is possible to enlarge sales of products through communication. It is the prospect of fusing selling and communicating that induces interest on the part of advertisers to make use of television or radio to disseminate their promotional messages. Therefore a system has emerged in which advertisers buy airtime from the broadcasters, either fifteen-or thirty- or sixty-second spots, to be inserted in programmes that are furnished by the networks (Ang, 1997: 249).

Vital to this transaction, is the fact that advertisers want to be given some kind of guarantee as to the number of people their message will be reaching and what the demographic of the said audience is, as this will determine whether they are able to reach their target market with maximum exposure for their money, as these advertising spots are not cheap. Essentially, what the networks are selling to advertisers is an audience. In order to determine that the transaction is a fair one, the audience has to be measurable in some way so that a selling price can be determined. It is at this juncture that the concept of audience measurement becomes important. "Audience measurement bears an economic meaning in so far as it produces the necessary standard through which advertising rates can be set" (Ang, 1997: 249). The greater the number of people who watch a programme, the more expensive the advertising rate.

Ratings firms such as Nielson in America exist to supply the information necessary to broker deals between advertisers and networks. They provide the information that determines the value of specific time slots as they measure the size of the viewing audience. They mould the audience into a quantifiable object for sale. This exercise is one which "has encountered many real and perceived imperfections . . . which have not only led to continuing competition between ratings firms, but also, often enough, to skirmishes between advertisers and networks over the right measurement standards" (Ang, 1997: 250).

Given that advertisers and networks have historically been interested in the "monolithic conceptions of the viewer" to which Stuart Hall refers (Hall, 1986: 10), there has

traditionally been a great divide between the kind of 'mainstream' positivist approach to audience measurement favoured by ratings organizations and the qualitative research undertaken by academic researchers. Sometimes the divide is so great, as to almost set them up in opposition to each other. A conversation I had with a media planner<sup>1</sup> from one of South Africa's largest advertising agencies about my research, illustrates this. She expressed interest in my research, but said that while it was 'interesting', it was not of value in the world of advertising where audience research was concerned. As a media planner, she was concerned purely with giving her clients a viewer 'head count'. The details of how the audience interacted with programmes was of no commercial value to her, and therefore of no importance.

The opinion expressed by this media planner is representative of attitudes throughout the industry, both locally and abroad. Advertisers and networks regard the audience as a commodity, and as such they are not interested in what this commodity thinks or feels or how it interprets programmes, as this has little bearing on the process of economic exchange for which it is used.

As Shaun Moores points out, notwithstanding the continued use of qualitative scales such as viewer 'appreciation indices', quantitative data on audience size presently dominates industry thinking (Moores, 1997: 225). Moores refers to the work conducted by Ien Ang into the nature of

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<sup>1</sup> A media planner is responsible for analysing the ratings figures supplied by ratings companies in order to determine which spots should be occupied by clients for advertising their products and what rates are payable for the air time.

commercial audience measurement, and her critique thereof. According to Moores,

[Ang] recognizes that the ratings are institutionally enabling, a necessary 'fiction' for the broadcasters, but also believes them to be epistemologically limited. In other words, they can serve a useful economic function for the industry and yet simultaneously misrepresent everyday activities of television consumption (Moores, 1997: 225).

Ang's polemic (described by Moores above) goes on to assert, "the audience commodity has no objective existence outside of ratings research - and is therefore produced in those very practices of audience measurement" (Moores, 1997: 226). The term 'measurement' defines the nature of the ratings system. To 'measure' something implies quantification, an estimate of size, rather than an *understanding* of the article being measured. The ongoing desire of networks is to convert "the 'elusive' occurrence of real people watching television into a known, objectified category" (Moores, 1997: 226) to sell to advertisers.

### **An overview of audience measurement in practice in a global context**

The quest in which ratings companies are engaged involves the creation of a technical instrument of measurement able to monitor viewers' movements in front of the television screen 24 hours a day, "thereby revealing the exact size and

demographic shape of a television audience to broadcasters and advertisers" (Moores, 1997: 226).

Moores explains that the initial methods of audience measurement employed by networks involved questionnaire surveys conducted by telephone or street interviews. This evolved into the systems of electronic 'set meters' and diary entries in a chosen 'panel' of households by means of which ratings were determined (Moores, 1997: 226).

"These panels were samples which had been designed to represent the viewing population as a whole. Their programme choices were supposedly 'generalizable' - resulting in the claim that a given number of people, counted in their millions, watched a particular television broadcast. The set meter gave an accurate statement of when the television was switched on, off or channels were changed. It told researchers which channel was being received in the panel home. A diary served as a supplementary source of data, with the household members being asked to keep a written record of their personal viewing habits (Moores, 1997: 226).

Both these methods were however profoundly flawed. Diaries for example, depended on the conscientiousness and honesty of the panel members for their accuracy and "knowing when a screen is switched on is not the same thing as knowing whether anyone is actually looking at the screen" (Moores, 1997: 226). As Moores points out, most people know from

their own domestic viewing experiences that the act of watching television is often combined with several other activities such as eating, talking on the telephone or reading a magazine or a newspaper, so that the television has to compete for space and time in the household context (Moore, 1997: 226). In response to these flaws and others, institutional researchers have now developed a device called a 'people meter' which is designed to "monitor individual viewing habits within the panel home" (Moore, 1997: 227). It combines the previous functions of the set meter and diary in a synthesized electronic device. Ang explains the workings of the 'people meter' as follows:

When a viewer begins to watch a programme, (s)he must press a numbered button on a portable keypad, which looks like the well-known remote control device. When a viewer stops watching, the button must be pressed again. A monitor attached to the television set lights up regularly to remind the viewer of the button-pushing task. Every member of a sample family has her or his own individual button, while there are also some extra buttons for guests (Ang, 1992: 137) quoted in (Moore, 1997: 227).

Despite the inclusion of the monitor in the device, doubts about the co-operation of consumers in using the gadget remain, which has led to a further innovation in the form of what is known as a 'passive people meter'. Here the necessity for a human hand to intervene is apparently eliminated altogether. The passive people meter is a camera-like, 'image recognition' device fitted to the television

set. It is able to record exactly which faces in the living room are directed at the screen. It cannot of course tell us how viewers are interpreting a programme, but it does "promise finally to realize the dreams of ratings agencies for the panoptic system of audience surveillance" (Moores, 1997: 227).

Even though the image recognition system described above is able to *visually* monitor the number of people looking at a TV set in a panel household at any time, it fails to capture the true nature of the viewing experiences of those watching, and is also incapable of measuring each individual's understanding of what they are watching, and is therefore unable to provide any information of how viewing differs from household to household, between genders and between different cultural, ethnic and religious groups. In a country such as South Africa, which is so diverse in the make-up of its population, this kind of information is vital, particularly for the producers of local productions, who need to have an understanding of their target audience.

As Moores states, the day-to-day existence of individuals or households and their consumption practices "does not lend itself to being measured because it exists as a dispersed domain of lived experiences and cultural meanings - not as a calculable object" (Moores, 1997: 227).

In order to delve into what lies 'behind the ratings', different methods with very different purposes have to be adopted. . . "[R]esearch needs to investigate the complex ways in which television is embedded in a ...range of everyday practices" (Morley, 1990: 8) quoted in (Moores, 1997: 228).

Institutional audience measurement in its current form is not able to do this. Ethnographic audience research is far more capable of defining or describing the complexity of the viewing environment than quantitative measurement techniques. As Moores states, "whereas ratings agencies are trying to build a profitable audience commodity through techniques of measurement, reception ethnographers are trying instead to produce resonant and detailed accounts of broadcast media consumption which are sensitive to the 'dynamics of interpretation, taste, power . . . to the qualitative aspects of reception or 'the politics of the living room'" (Moores, 1997: 228).

Having had the experience of interviewing students in a University residence environment, the complexities of the viewing context were immediately apparent. Simply doing a headcount of the people watching would have told me nothing about the way in which the students relate to *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*. Even if I was armed with a 'people monitor' like the ones used in panel households, this kind of measurement would have afforded no information other than how many people were watching and basic demographic information such as how many males and females and their ages. Observing the communal television room environment made it clear how much goes on in a single viewing - there is almost too much to take in. But detailed observation is also extremely limited - only after conducting my interviews, did I start to gain any real insight into the nature of the students' viewing experiences.



Given the density of the domestic viewing context, it is difficult to avoid becoming bewildered by the audience's meaning-producing capacity, as Silverstone is quoted as saying:

Television is potentially meaningful and therefore open to the constructive work of the consumer-viewer, both in terms of how it is used, or placed, in the household - in what rooms, where, associated with what other furniture or machines, the subject of what kinds of discourses inside and outside the home and in terms of how the meanings it makes available through the content of its programmes are in turn worked with by individuals and household groups who receive them (Silverstone, 1990: 179) quoted in Ang, 1996: 69).

The social construction of the viewing process is particularly important in the context of this thesis, as the 'domestic environment' in which the students watch television is quite literally a social/communal one. The act of viewing is coupled with conversation with friends and arguments with peers about the nature of what is being watched. Dialogue or discussion is a large part of the pleasure derived from watching soap operas. What makes the communal residence experience different from conventional domestic viewing environments is that the conversation is engaged in both *during* and after watching a soap - they do not need to wait until *after* viewing or the following day to converse with friends about their favourite soaps - the discussion is integrated into the viewing process.

## Radical Contextualization

Ang notes importantly that since market research is supposed to deliver information that can serve as the "common symbolic currency for industry negotiations and decision-making", too detailed a knowledge of the "radically contextual ways in which people consume and use media would only be counter-productive" (Ang, 1996: 73). Ang warns however against the dangers of what she calls 'radical contextualism' (Ang, 1996: 73), as in its extreme form, it is essentially infinite because the possibilities of intertextuality are never-ending. How does one then define the bounds of context? Ang explains further by means of the following quote from Jonathan Culler

[C]ontext is boundless, so accounts of context never fully provide full determinations of meanings. Against any set of formulations, one can imagine further possibilities of context, including the expansion of context produced by the reinscription within a context of the description of it (Culler in Ang, 1996: 74).

This kind of radical contextuality may be logical epistemologically, but is completely indefensible ontologically and not pragmatically enforceable (Ang, 1996: 73). The solution to this dilemma is that researchers have to accept the fact that their descriptions of an audience's viewing context are limited to the researcher's own descriptive and cognitive capacities (Ang, 1996: 75). This is not to say that such descriptions are inaccurate, they

are simply limited in relation to the concept of radical contextualisation.

### **The Appreciation Index**

One of the key problems with the institutional audience research examined in this chapter, is that the audience's level of enjoyment and understanding of a particular programme cannot be measured by the quantitative measurement techniques used by networks and public broadcasters. The 'Audience appreciation index' is a measure designed to try and combat these failings. The 'audience index' or 'AI'. Audiences are requested to report on the programmes they have watched during the course of a week and to indicate their appreciation of each of them by using a grading system, for example, 'enjoyable' or 'extremely enjoyable' to indicate the degree of pleasure the viewer derived from each programme. According to Goodhart *et al* "the advantage of this simplicity is that a viewer can be asked to comment on a large number of programmes of varying types" (Goodhart *et al*, 1987: 88).

It must be borne in mind however, that while this grading system may go some way towards providing more in-depth, accurate information on viewers' reactions to shows, the information it provides is still inadequate. Grading levels of 'enjoyment' or 'pleasure' do not provide insight into the way viewers understand or relate to specific shows and characters.

Goodhart et al also point out that there is no correlation between the Appreciation Index and audience size. For example, a show with low ratings may be watched and enjoyed by a small group of people, who continue to enjoy the show even though they are part of only a select few who do. Conversely, viewers may keep their television sets switched on during highly rated shows, without actually paying attention to what is on the screen, or without experiencing great enjoyment (Goodhart et al, 1987: 90).

### **Quantitative research and its inability to capture divergent audience interpretations**

One of the main shortcomings of the kind of quantitative audience research described in this chapter, is its inability to describe and define the divergent nature of audience interpretation as indicated in the above discussion. The anomalies which occur amongst viewers are largely as a result of differences in age, gender, religion and culture amongst members of an audience, particularly in a country as culturally diverse as South Africa. There is no such thing as a 'South African' viewing public, because South Africans are not an homogenous group.

One of the key aspects of this thesis, is the analysis of a group of Zulu speaking university students' interpretation and enjoyment of a South African and an American soap opera. Another element of the research involved comparing the research findings of this thesis with other soap opera audience studies conducted in various parts of the world in an effort to define the distinct nature of the viewing

experiences of the students interviewed, as well as the similarities between this group and other groups that have been studied and analysed in relation to soap operas.

Sonia Livingstone (1995) focuses on the complex nature of soap viewers and the divergent nature of their experiences, and how crucial it is for audience studies to recognise both the areas of consensus and divergence between soap viewers. Livingstone posits three possible methodological solutions for audience research to deal with the contradictory elements of consensus and divergence amongst soap viewers. One of these involves the use of qualitative research methods such as ethnography. Livingstone notes that even though such methods are open to criticism concerning their reliability and representativeness because the groups or individuals analysed are so much smaller than those examined by quantitative researchers, in spite of these shortcomings, qualitative methods "have notable advantages in terms of sensitivity, richness, and complexity" (Livingstone, 1995: 166).

In order to gain greater insight into "the nature and extent of divergence in specific interpretations of character and narrative among viewers" (Livingstone, 1995: 167) Livingstone conducted an open-ended preliminary study of twenty seven women covering a wide range of ages and occupations (not students) "who were all regular and longstanding viewers of *Coronation Street* [a long-running British daily soap opera]" (Livingstone, 1995: 167). The women were asked to recollect four narratives involving the popular and central character, Rita Fairclough. "No

restrictions were placed on which narratives they recalled: they were simply asked to recall any narratives which they had seen at any time in the programme's history" (Livingstone, 1995: 167). Each respondent was provided with pens and paper (with no time limit imposed) and asked to

describe freely the narratives as they remembered them, including in their accounts details of what happened, how Rita and other characters reacted and felt, and what the events might reveal about Rita's character. These instructions were given to encourage viewers to reveal their own inferences and judgements and to discourage a bland, denotative or behavioural description (Livingstone, 1995: 167).

A wide range of narratives was recounted by the respondents ranging over a period of years, but the majority focused on recent episodes. Livingstone arranged the accounts she received by the narrative recalled, and then compared them to see how the same narrative was recollected by different viewers in order to establish whether or not they were consensual in their descriptions and what types and degrees of divergence occurred (Livingstone, 1995: 167). According to Livingstone the results revealed something of the viewers' unpremeditated experience of the programme, as the memories which they recalled are probably the most readily available and important to them when viewing the programme and interpreting new narratives (Livingstone, 1995: 168).

The interviews conducted for this thesis revealed a great deal of the divergence and consensus patterns revealed in Livingstone's study. Even though the interviews did not involve the recounting of specific episodes, I asked the respondents questions related to particular events on the soaps in an effort to gauge their reactions to storylines and events. The same unpremeditated responses described by Livingstone were evident in the interviews I conducted with the students. There was a candid relating of specific events, which was similar to the way in which one tells a story that has recently happened in one's own life or to close friends or family.

I found that discussion around specific characters on *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* revealed interesting examples of divergence and consensus, particularly where Brooke on *The Bold* and Ntsiki on *Generations* were concerned. Both these women are strong and powerful (and manipulative), yet they both have a certain vulnerability which can be endearing. Even though Ntsiki and Brooke are two very different characters, the responses they elicited from the students were very similar. They were either loathed or loved, with discussion around both being very clear-cut and emotionally charged. The following extracts from interviews with two female students reveal similar condemnations of Brooke and Ntsiki

Michele: Who don't you like on *The Bold*?

Nomandla: Brooke and Grant<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Grant is a peripheral character who appeared first as Brooke's love interest and then as Macy Alexander's love interest. He was eventually written out of the soap. Nomandla is a fan of Taylor's, hence her animosity towards Brooke.

Michele: Why?

Nomandla: She is bitchy and he is stupid.

Michele: Who don't you like on Generations?

Vicky: Ntsiki.

Michele: Why?

Vicky: She is not really a friend. She just thinks of herself and what will be good for her, and not how the next person will feel. She is a manipulator.

With Ntsiki, it was clear that the majority of respondents hated her because of her baneful conduct. A handful expressed a reluctant fondness for her, though this came across tinged with guilt as if they were ashamed of admitting that they liked her, in case they fell victim to public censure. Brooke however, had a great many detractors *as well as* sympathizers.

### **Institutional Audience Measurement in South Africa: a local context**

Given that the research conducted for this thesis was undertaken in South Africa, and that one focus is on comparing the consumption of soap operas in South Africa to their consumption globally, it is important that the institutional audience techniques employed in South Africa be described. It is also important for the reader to understand the Television Audience Measurement Systems (TAMS) figures as I have made use of them in this thesis.



Audience measurement for the media industry is undertaken by an organization called SAARF, the South African Advertising Research Foundation.

#### **TAMS: a synopsis**

'TAMS' stands for Television Audience Measurement Systems, and is the system employed by SAARF to compile television audience figures for the media industry.

Before the implementation of 'peplemeters' in South Africa, audiences were measured using quarterly TV Diaries. SAARF adopted the electronic meter or peplemeter system used in the UK, Europe and the USA in the 1980s, based on its rapidity and reliability, which had been put to the test in other parts of the world. Financially, the investment in the electronic metering system made sense by virtue of the fact that it would make the whole process of gathering audience figures more efficient and accurate, and also because SAARF determined that it was unlikely that any revolutionary developments in the system were likely to take place in the short to medium term. It went ahead and prepared a comprehensive specification for the existing AMPS (All Media Products Survey) Meter System [now the SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey: SAARF TAMS].

SAARF awarded the contract for implementing TAMS to ACNielsen in the mid 1980s. Amid political unrest in South Africa in 1986, ACNielsen dis-invested and IBIS, the company that reverted back to ACNielsen a few years later, took over their South African interests, including the television

metering contract. Due to political sanctions in the 1980s SAARF and IBIS had no choice but to develop their own metering system and the software to operate it, and so the Mark 1 Meter came into being (TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 3).

**The Mark 1 Meter**

The initial hardware for the Mark 1 Meter could only be used in homes with electricity and a telephone with an automatic exchange. Given the low penetration of telephones in black areas in the 1980s, the mark 1 Meter panel consisted of white, coloured and Indian households with mains electricity and automatic telephones. As a result the total television coverage was as follows:

Racial Groups	Percentage %
➤ Whites	➤ 81,5
➤ Coloureds	➤ 62,8
➤ Indians	➤ 75,0
➤ Blacks	➤ 0,0

The first weekly report based on the results from the Mark 1 Meter was released in July 1989. "This new TV currency was quickly grasped by the media planning industry and the broadcasters. Soon SAARF was asked to look at extending the AMPS Meter System to black TV households" (TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 3).

## **The Mark 2 Meter**

The Mark 2 Meter was developed in South Africa in 1991. It could operate via radio transmitters in households without telephones, which meant that it could now be extended into more black households.

The daily viewing data in non-telephone households was transmitted by radio to a 'host' meter in an automatic telephone household. The host telephone would then receive the viewing data for both 'host' and any linked non-telephone household. The 'host' meter could be as far as 25 km away, depending on the terrain (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 3).

The Mark 2 Meter represented a breakthrough as it enabled SAARF to establish a black meter panel as well as extend the coloured, Indian and white coverage to include households without automatic telephones. SAARF limited its coverage of black audiences to metropolitan areas, cities and towns. This decision was based on the "low incidence of Black households with TV sets and mains electricity in villages and rural areas, as well as the practical difficulties of finding suitable automatic telephone households to act as 'hosts'" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 4).

## **The 1990s: the next generation of meters**

After 1994, the year in which South Africa had its first democratic election in which blacks were allowed for the first time to vote, the political and social climate of the

country changed drastically. SAARF had to mobilise and adapt to the changing face of the country. Technologically, the old meters were reaching the end of their usable lifespan and by 1999 the decision was taken to use the Finnish Eurometer from Mitron and PCTips software from ACNeilson's Systems Asia Pacific to collect and process the viewership data the SAARF TAMS panel. By the year 2000 the decision was taken to remove all the old Mark 1 and 2 Meters and replace them with Eurometers, and by 2001 there were no old meters left in the system. By this time, ACNeilson had had bought back IBIS and was once again running the system for SAARF.

### **The advent of satellite channels in South Africa**

"The advent of digital satellite TV posed worldwide measurement problems. This was new technology, and the developed world was struggling with the challenge of measuring this service" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 4). For this reason SAARF decided not to measure satellite TV households in South Africa until a technical solution had been found. "Consequently the universe definition excluded satellite households up to the end of 2000" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 4). The problem however was that as DSTV (digital satellite television) became more popular, the SAARF TAMS universe was becoming "more and more skewed away from the real TV universe in South Africa" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 4).

In the year 2000 it was established that DSTV could be measured as a single channel by recognising the DSTV frequency in a satellite household. By July 2001, ACNielsen

was able to separate out the various component channels making up DSTV, "in order to merge the satellite ratings of all the terrestrial channels with their terrestrial ratings. Thus the M-Net rating became a composite of the satellite rating added to the terrestrial rating, and so on for SABC 1, SABC 2, etc." (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 4). Given that satellite households make up only approximately 11,4% of the total SAARF TAMS panel, few channels are robust enough to warrant being separately reported hence,

In July 2001, Oracle Airtime Sales implemented ACNielsen's proposal to augment 'naturally' occurring satellite households on the panel, with a 'booster' panel of randomly located satellite households to create a satellite 'sub-panel' of 300 households. During processing the enlarged DSTV sample is down-weighted to its natural incidence (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 5).

#### **TAMS: METHODOLOGY**

SAARF compiles TAMS reports weekly. The TAMS data is made up of adults 16 years and older, and children in the households between the ages of 7 and 15. All panel households are private households with electricity laid on and a working television set.

What is interesting, is that even though the country has undergone profound political changes since 1994, these changes are not fully reflected in the TAMS data. In the case of black households, coverage still does not include

rural areas and villages, whereas white coloured and Indian households the coverage is national. What this means in practical terms, is that even though the political face of the country may have changed, living conditions for black people have not improved. The TAMS data cannot include blacks living in rural areas because homes in these areas are still not equipped with electricity and automatic telephones. SAARF states however that both telephone and non-telephone households are covered. The reason for the exclusion is (according to SAARF) technical. It is, they say, "simply because the coverage of Telkom and FastNet base stations prohibit downloading data from these households" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 6).

In 1998, Tony Twyman, technical director of the Broadcasters Audience Research Board (BARB) was invited by SAARF to visit South Africa and evaluate the SAARF TAMS operation. One of the problems he pointed out was the fact that "the number of households actually reporting each week was too low to give consistently stable ratings, particularly when precise target market definitions were used" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report 2002: 7).

SAARF decided to grow the TAMS panel from a weekly reporting group of 550 to a panel of 1200 reporting households. The current panel totals 1356 reporting households, which are constituted as follows:

REPORTING HOUSEHOLDS	REPRESENTATIVE PANEL	AUGMENTED DSTV	TOTAL
NON- SATELLITE	1056	-	1056
SATELLITE	144	156	300
TOTALS	1200	156	1356

(SAARF TAMS TECHNICAL REPORT 2002: 7)

From January 2001, satellite households have been included in the SAARF TAMS panel. When fully installed, the panel will consist of 1500 households, providing a stable weekly reporting base of 1200 households. The balance of 300 are those households not reporting in the period, for various reasons, technical, domestic or administrative. Of these 1200 households, approximately 144 are DSTV households.

#### **TAMS sample design**

The panel design is "drawn via an area stratified probability design" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 6). What gives Nielson the edge when it comes to winning the SAARF tender to implement its audience measurement systems is the fact that it is in possession of a household register, which in audience measurement is worth its weight in gold, "as it is used to provide actual contact addresses in each sampling area" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 6).

Certain procedures are followed when recruiting a household. Usually an adult member of the household will be interviewed and asked certain demographic questions. "Systematic updates

on one twelfth of the panel households take place monthly, on a rotating basis, so that at any point in time the information is never older than one year" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 6).

Every television panel throughout the world needs an 'establishment survey' which "estimates the universe and sets down the parameters under which the sample is designed. SAARF TAMS uses SAARF AMPS [All Media Products Survey] as its establishment survey" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 7). The AMPS Report is released every six months and the SAARF TAMS universe is adjusted accordingly.

#### **How the TV rating is measured**

The meter deals with different viewing scenarios as follows:

- When a person logs in for less than 15 seconds, that viewing is discarded.
- When a person changes stations for less than 15 seconds, that viewing is allocated to the station viewed prior to the change.
- When a person changes station for a period longer than 15 seconds, the viewing is allocated to the new station as from the time of the change. The change is only made after he/she has viewed for 15 seconds, but back-dated to where he/she was first found at the new station.

Whilst the Eurometer continuously scans the status of TV sets and individuals in time intervals of less than a



second, it ignores any viewing session of less than 15 seconds.

The purpose of this filter is to eliminate momentary viewing that lacks 'persistence'. The advantage of this international convention is to strip out 'noise' in the data. (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 9).

Panel members are asked to define their TV viewing in the following manner to determine when they should log on or not. "TV viewing is being in a position where you are able to see the screen of a TV set which is switched on to a live TV broadcast" (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 10).

Visitors are also factored into the panel. Anyone visiting the household from the age of 7 upwards who is not normally resident in the household is classified as a visitor. Visitors are allocated the same income and home language as the host family (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 10).

#### **How the TVR (TV rating is calculated)**

A rating is the proportion of viewers, averaged across some time period (a commercial spot or break, a ¼ hour or a programme) and percentaged on the total number of individual panel members in the relevant group (e.g. 'all adults' or 'females').

Ratings are calculated by summing up the products of numbers of viewers and relevant times spent viewing [within the period concerned] and dividing by the product of the total number of potential viewers and the duration of the period

concerned. A rating is thus in effect, a time-weighted average of audience size, indicated by an index which varies between 0 and 100 – the rating (SAARF TAMS Technical Report, 2002: 8).

### **How much do the audience figures actually tell us?**

As discussed in this chapter, quantitative television audience figures like the TAMS figures, are designed primarily for the advertising industry to be able to decide where their clients should be placing their advertisements. The TV networks (and specifically in the case of this thesis, the SABC), rely on advertising revenue for their survival. Even though the SABC is not solely dependent on advertising revenue as it is subsidised by the state and TV licenses, advertising is nevertheless important.

While it makes sense to measure audiences in this way for the advertisers, the figures tell us nothing about how and why people are watching television, and how what they watch impacts on their lives. Given the large following that both *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* have with young black viewers in South Africa, the way they interpret these soaps and integrate them into their lives becomes an important social question. When examining the TAMS reports from 1998 through to 2002, I randomly picked the month of May as an indicator to gauge how *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* rate in the top ten programmes on SABC 1.

The figures inadvertently reveal how programmes are aimed at specific race groups. For example, *Generations* did not appear even once in the top ten programmes watched by

English/Afrikaans speaking adults and children in the analysis of figures in the month of May 1998-2002, whereas it featured consistently in the top ten list for Nguni/Sotho speaking adults and children. The irony is that *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American product, appealed to both English/Afrikaans and Nguni/Sotho speaking adults and children, which serves as an indicator of its universal appeal. It is no surprise therefore that over 200 million people all over the world watch *The Bold* in 79 foreign markets in multiple languages, including Mandarin Chinese. This attests to the fact that audiences have a desire to for familiar faces - Eric (John McCook), Stephanie (Susan Flannery), Ridge (Ron Moss) and Brooke (Katherine Kelly Lange), who have been on the soap since it first aired in 1987, fifteen years ago ([www.sabc.co.za/tv/sabc1/bold.htm](http://www.sabc.co.za/tv/sabc1/bold.htm)). The audience figures show that *Generations* has an audience which is predominantly black with a minimal white viewership, even though the soap is multi-lingual and subtitled in English. The audience figures from the month of May 1998 are reproduced below. The figures show a breakdown of viewers in terms of language and age.

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

ADULTS

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	10.3
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	10.1
MIND YOUR LANGUAGE (Tue)	10.1
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	10.0
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	9.7
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	9.6
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	9.5
A U M (Mon)	9.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	9.3
PICKET FENCES (Wed)	8.9
MARTIN (Tue)	8.9

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

CHILDREN

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	14.0
PICKET FENCES (Wed)	7.6
TELLY FUN QUIZ (Mon)	7.5
MARTIN (Tue)	6.6
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	6.6
FAMILY MATTERS (Wed)	6.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	6.3
MIND YOUR LANGUAGE (Tue)	6.2
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Fri)	5.9
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Mon)	5.8

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

ADULTS

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	25.1
GENERATIONS (Tue)	22.7
GENERATIONS (Thu)	22.3
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	21.6
NEWS (Thu)	21.2
FOOTPRINTS (Tue)	20.7
MIND YOUR LANGUAGE (Tue)	19.4
JAM ALLY (Fri)	19.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Fri)	18.8
MARTIN (Tue)	18.6

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

CHILDREN

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	28.1
GENERATIONS (Tue)	27.1
MO' MONEY (Sat)	26.7
FOOTPRINTS (Tue)	26.1
GENERATIONS (Thu)	25.5
MUSIC (Sat)	24.7
SELIMATHUNZI (Sat)	24.5
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	23.9
A DIFFERENT WORLD (Fri)	23.3
MARTIN (Tue)	22.7

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

ADULTS

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	18.7
MIND YOUR LANGUAGE (Tue)	14.5
MARTIN (Tue)	13.5
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	13.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	13.4
GENERATIONS (Tue)	13.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Fri)	13.2
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	13.2
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	12.7
IZWI LABANTU (Tue)	12.5



SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey  
Formerly known as AMPS METERS

CHILDREN

MON 11/05/98 TO SUN 17/05/98

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
MISS UNIVERSE 1998 (Wed)	21.9
MO' MONEY (Sat)	17.1
GENERATIONS (Tue)	15.8
MARTIN (Tue)	15.6
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	15.4
SELIMATHUNZI (Sat)	15.1
GENERATIONS (Thu)	14.8
FOOTPRINTS (Tue)	14.8
MUSIC (Sat)	14.6
MIND YOUR LANGUAGE (Tue)	14.5
21 JUMP STREET (Sat)	14.5

I have reproduced an extensive range of figures in the Appendix 2, to illustrate the consistency with which *The Bold and the Beautiful* appeals to all language groups and ages, as well as how *Generations* is consistently popular with Nguni/Sotho speaking adults and children, but does not feature with English/Afrikaans speaking audiences. This serves to illustrate the fact that in the case of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, an American soap opera appeals to a wider cross-section of the population than a local soap opera (*Generations*).

**Why is it that an American soap opera appeals to a wider portion of the South African population than a locally produced soap like *Generations*?**

One possible reason may be that *Generations* was originally conceptualised as a means of redressing the absence of any dramas or soap operas on the SABC, which featured powerful professional black characters, so it was aimed at a black audience. Soaps by their nature though suggest that they should have universal appeal, regardless of the race of the characters. *The Bold* centres on a wealthy and powerful white American family, yet it appeals to a black South African audience.

The country's past may have something to do with the fact that *Generations* does not cross over into a white audience. South Africa is a country, which has been categorized by racial differences for several decades, and it may take time for people's perceptions to change. The interviews I conducted reveal that even though the students watch

*Generations* and in some instances prefer it to *The Bold*, they all indicated that the quality of production of *The Bold* was superior to that of *Generations*. Their responses also revealed that they assumed that anything American would, by definition, be better than something local. Some said that *Generations* was trying to emulate *The Bold* as evidenced in the following quote from an interview with a male student called Maphunye and a female student called Nelly.

Michele: What do you think about the quality of production of *The Bold and the Beautiful* compared to that of *Generations*?

Nelly: Since *Generations* is new compared to *The Bold*, I think it starting to improve, but it mustn't try to be like *The Bold and the Beautiful*, it must demonstrate its own things and ideas.

[Interestingly, Nelly said that she found both soaps unrealistic]

Michele: Do you think that the fact that *Generations* is a local soap makes it more convincing or realistic than *The Bold*?

Maphunye: Not really, because the first time I saw *Generations* I got the feeling they wanted to make a *Bold and the Beautiful* in South Africa.

The interviews revealed that, for the students, the yardstick for measuring a soap opera is *The Bold and the Beautiful*, and it is the standard against which they measure *Generations*. It is constantly being evaluated not only for authenticity but also how it rates against *The Bold*.

### **Divergence in retelling of specific narrative events**

One way of gaining insight into how an audience makes sense of a soap opera text, is to analyse the way in which it retells narrative events. This is something, which quantitative figures obviously do not reveal. Livingstone (1995) discusses the fact that her study revealed that respondents recounted certain events inaccurately. This, however, she largely attributes to misremembering or misunderstanding of events (Livingstone, 1995: 171).

During the interviews I conducted for this thesis, I found myself having to prompt respondents regarding the recall of certain events in the narratives of both *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. This was necessary largely due to the fact that some of the events I asked them about had occurred in episodes from previous years.

Unlike Livingstone, my purpose in asking about events from both soaps was not primarily to establish patterns of consensus and divergence, but rather to use events to elicit responses from the interviewees on specific characters and incidents. My intent was to gauge how they reacted to certain controversial storylines in relation to their own lived experiences, as well as to establish their feelings in relation to their cultural and family backgrounds. One issue which I explored was how they felt about Brooke's romantic involvement with the men in the Forester family. The reactions varied only slightly, with most of the respondents claiming that her behaviour would not be tolerated in their

society. This was the case even when they clearly sympathized with her.

### **Summary**

Livingstone refers to various psychological reasons which may explain why viewers have divergent opinions concerning characters on a soap and these relate specifically to why viewers identify with certain characters and not others. "Potkay and Potkay (1984) show that viewers identify with cartoon characters according to their perceived similarity to the characters, and further that this identification is independent of character evaluation" while others suggest that

viewers need to identify with a character in order to adopt their perspective. Noble argues that viewers interpret narratives through a process of recognition, entering into the action by playing against a character who is similar to someone they know in real life. Alternatively it may be that, despite the findings of Potkay and Potkay (1984) for cartoon characters, character evaluation does play a role in soap opera in which viewers take the perspective of liked characters against disliked characters (Livingstone, 1995: 175).

The principle in character involvement and association identified by Livingstone above was evident in this study. The character of Taylor Hayes Forester was a favourite among the female students, and most seemed to admire her because

she is a symbol of strength, integrity, kindness and professional success all conveniently combined in one stunningly beautiful package. Taylor has 'beaten' Brooke time and again in the 'contest' to win Ridge's affection, which sends the message to viewers that her qualities are worthy of emulation rather than Brooke's. When asked if Taylor reminded them of someone they knew in their own lives, most of the students said yes.

I found it was not that the students saw themselves in their favourite characters, but rather that they saw who they *aspired* to be. This may have something to do with their age and the fact that they are not yet established in careers and are still in the process of finding out what and who they want to be. I found that particularly the male students related to Ridge or Eric because they were in some way impressed with or wanted to emulate them - either their dress sense or their professional achievements or their success with women. Taylor and Brooke were also popular among both male and female students. There was a strong sense also, where they were concerned, of students admiring and wanting to emulate them, as evidenced in the following quote from an interview with a male student, Buhle.

Michele: Who is your favourite character on *The Bold*?

Buhle: Brooke Logan.

Michele: Why?

Buhle: She has a stunning figure and is also beautiful. Taylor is also pretty, but Brooke is just something better. She is very assertive - like what every woman would dream of. She is like a role model because she

does what she wants and she is a successful woman. Even though her love life is confused, with her involvement with Eric and his sons, she is still a very strong, talented and successful woman.

Ultimately, as Livingstone puts it, if the "same events are viewed from a variety of different perspectives, with varying evaluative stances and concerns, then different interpretations of the same narrative must result" (Livingstone, 1995: 175). One extreme example of how different individuals react to the same narrative came out of an interview with a male student called Siya. In his interview we discussed an incident that had taken place on *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Jessica Forester, Eric's niece, who was on the soap for a few seasons, was raped by a man (Sly, a bar tender who has since left the soap) who had shown romantic interest in her and whose advances she had rejected. He attacked her wearing a mask in a dark alley, so she did not recognise him, but the viewers were clued into who the rapist was from the beginning. Siya and I discussed this episode and our discussion revealed that he had interpreted the incident in a rather shocking and controversial way, partly I think because of his personal background and attitude to women.

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold*?

Siya: What I like about *The Bold and the Beautiful* is the way they do things there is like the way we do things here - especially young people.

Michele: Can you give me an example?

Siya: For example, the time Sly - that guy who is in prison now, said that he would rape Jessica because he liked her. When you see a girl you want to sleep with, you do it and after that it's over and finished.

Michele: Don't you think there is a difference between sex and rape?

Siya: There is no difference because if a man wants a woman he must take her.

Michele: Do you believe that this is right?

Siya: I understand why people say from the woman's point of view that rape is wrong, because she doesn't want sex and the man does, but most guys don't care about this.

Siya's response reveals how sometimes the meaning the producers intend to convey, and the meaning which is actually made by the viewer, are divergent. In Siya's case, his interpretation was based on his own personal experiences and moral code, which made his point of view (though horrifying in its implications) his own.

Quantitative audience figures like those produced by SAARF, give us no insight into the kinds of meanings people make from a text, and what impact it has on their lives. The interviews conducted for this thesis are what Arthur Asa Berger calls "depth interviews" (Berger, 1998: 55). They are like probes into people's habits and lives. They do not profess to provide definitive or universally applicable 'answers', but what they can do, is provide in-depth insights into people's viewing habits and attitudes and the way they experience and enjoy a text, which is something quantitative audience studies cannot do.



## Chapter 5

### What is ethnographic audience research?

The research model used for this thesis is known as 'ethnographic' audience research. This chapter will attempt to explain how the model works in theory and in practice. Ethnographic audience research is the most recent development in the evolution of audience response studies. It assumes audiences use and interact with television and other popular forms of entertainment in a variety of ways, depending on intercultural, social, class, race and age variables (Brown, 1994: 73). It is essentially qualitative, and is usually carried out in the form of in-depth interviews with a small number of people, and may also be supplemented with some kind of participant observation, which could for example, take the form of subjects being video taped while being interviewed, and later allowed to watch themselves on video. This type of qualitative empirical research is now recognised by many as one of the most adequate ways to learn about the differentiated subtleties of people's engagements with television and other media (see Ang, 1994).

Shaun Moores points out that [a]lthough the use of ethnography in media studies - as a method for investigating the social world of actual audiences - may still be relatively new, there is a long history of such work in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Moores, 1995: 3). Whether seeking to document the customs and traditions of

exotic others in distant lands, or examining practices and environments in their native countries, researchers have evolved a now established array of qualitative techniques, most notably the extended period of participant observation in the field and the unstructured conversational interview with informants (Moores, 1995: 3).

Some academics argue that there has been a terminological usurpation of ethnography by interpretivist media theorists. The basis of the critique of using ethnography in media studies, is that anthropological ethnography requires long-term immersion and investigation, the implication being that the informants' points of view cannot be grasped in a series of one-off in-depth interviews, that may not even last more than an hour (see Gillespie, 1995). This kind of critique of audience ethnography is without foundation, for as Lindlof notes, "[t]he term *ethnography* does not imply any single method or type of data analysis [...] Basically, ethnographers will turn to any method that will help them to achieve the goals of good ethnography" (Lindlof, 1995: 19).

In the case of television audience studies, there are practical reasons why researchers cannot carry out lengthy spells of participant observation, not the least of which, are the difficulties associated with gaining prolonged access to contexts of consumption - usually the private sphere of the household (Moores, 1995: 4). It follows from this, that the best method of research in audience reception studies is the in-depth interview. The fact therefore that such studies do not use the same methods as anthropological ethnography, does not mean that they do not deserve the title of ethnography.

As has already been stated, audience ethnographies have become associated with the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured

interview (Gillespie, 1995: 55). This method has faced criticism from some quarters, the basis of the censure being that observations of actual behaviour are more accurate as a means of establishing actual viewer activity. The problem with the observation technique is that it leaves open the question of interpretation. For example, a subject may be observed sitting staring fixedly at the television screen, but this behaviour could be equally indicative of fascination with whatever is on the TV screen as complete boredom. The distinction may not be readily discernible to the observer. Moreover, if one wanted to ascertain what the actual state of mind of the viewer being observed is, one would probably have to ask him. The observed may lie or misrepresent his thoughts and feelings, but at least through his verbal responses, the researcher can gain some kind of access to the language the observed uses and also gain insight into the categorisations through which he constructs his conscious world (see Morley, 1992).

As discussed in Chapter 3, my presence generated a great deal of giggling, whispering and staring. Also, given that the gatherings of people in front of the TV set were large, it was impossible for me to monitor everyone's behaviour. As Morley points out, the interview method should therefore be defended for the following reasons:

not simply for the access it gives the research to the respondents conscious opinions and statements

but also for the access that it gives to the linguistic terms and categories [...] through which respondents construct their words and their own understanding of their activities (Morley, 1992: 181).

It is important realise, that for the ethnographic researcher, complete knowledge of his/her subjects or informants is an unattainable fantasy. Bearing this in mind, it is important to note also, that ethnographic discourses are of necessity coloured by the subjectivity of the researcher, who acts as an observer and interpreter of events. According to Moores however, this does not mean that we should disappear down a self-reflexive cul-de-sac (Moores, 1995: 4). To elaborate an adequate account of media consumption, Moores proposes

[W]e hang on to an interest in recording the experiences and interpretations of others [...]. It is quite permissible to recognise the partial nature of our knowledge without losing a determination to reconstruct the consumers point of view (Moores, 1995: 4).

The aim of ethnographic audience studies is to examine the dynamics of action and constraint in the daily activities and practices of the individuals and groups who are engaged in the socially situated production and consumption of meanings (Morley, 1992: 183). Ethnographic audience study acknowledges the differences between people despite their social construction, and pluralises the meanings and pleasures that they find in television. It thus contradicts

theories that stress the singularity of television's meanings and its reading subjects (Fiske, 1994: 63).

In the 1980s "the notion of the powerful media user became widespread in communication and cultural studies"<sup>1</sup>. One of the main reasons for this shift in focus in audience research from examining the power of the text over the passive viewer to examining the how the active viewer interprets the text, is the massive amounts of media on offer and choice during this period.

### **Ethnographic audience research in practice**

Shaun Moores points out that since the late 1970s, what might be described as an ethnographic turn has taken place in studies of media consumption. New ways of investigating and interpreting audiences have emerged - attempts to chart the sense that media consumers make of the texts and technologies they encounter in everyday life (Moores, 1995: 1). Unlike the quantitative empirical audience researcher, Moores states that the ethnographer conceptualises media 'audiencehood' as lived experience and approaches his or her object with very different sorts of interests (Moores, 1995: 3). Moores asserts that there is no sense in denying the following:

as academic researchers, reception ethnographers also have some degree of personal investment in delimiting a category they can investigate (there are careers to be made and books to be written on

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<sup>1</sup> Website reference for Biltereyst: *The cultural imperialism thesis and qualitative audience research – more than revisionism and cultural populism?*: <http://www.unisa.ac.za...ss/comca/222/bilt.html>.

the audience!) - but an ethnographic method is nevertheless preferable to industry techniques precisely because it holds out the hope of representing consumption practices from the virtual standpoint of actual audiences (Moore, 1995: 3).

It must be borne in mind that ethnographies are discourses, and as such, cannot magically give us direct and unmediated access to the real. What they do have, however, is a greater potential for engaging with the production of meaning in everyday life (see Moore, 1995). An example of this kind of qualitative research was carried out by Ien Ang in her seminal study on *Dallas* discussed previously. The purpose of Ang's research, is best explained by the author herself in the following quote:

Apart from presenting a framework within which *Dallas* could be taken seriously, however, I also wished to contribute to further problematization and understanding of the social, cultural and political role of serials like *Dallas*. Thus, I also deal with issues which come to the fore as soon as one adopts a position acknowledging that *Dallas* does matter, especially bearing in mind its popularity: issues concerning pleasure and its vicissitudes, its relations with ideology and cultural politics (Ang, 1985: vii-viii).

Ang's research (by her own admission, makes no attempt to give the definitive answer to the burning question: why is *Dallas* so popular? (Ang, 1985: 5). Instead she focuses her

attention on a phenomenon, one aspect of popularity, which is in itself complex enough: pleasure (Ang, 1985: 6). In order to acquire information on the manner in which people experience watching *Dallas*, Ang placed a small advertisement in a Dutch women's magazine called *Viva*. The advertisement read as follows:

I like watching the TV serial *Dallas*, but often get odd reactions to it. Would anyone like to write and tell me why you like watching it too, or dislike it? I should like to assimilate these reactions in my university thesis. Please write to ... (Ang, 1985: 10).

Ang had forty-two replies to this advertisement. All the letters were addressed personally to her, and varied in length from a few lines to about ten pages. All the letters except three, were written by individuals, and only one was anonymous. All the others were provided with the sender's name and address. From these names it emerged that only three letters were from men or boys, the rest were from women or girls (see Ang, 1985). These letters form the empirical material on the basis of which Ang attempts to say something about what it can mean to watch *Dallas*. Ang acknowledges that the letters are not representative of the ways in which *Dallas* was received in general. Nor can it be assumed that they are speaking for the way in which a specific social category (for example, women) handles *Dallas*. Ang asserts that her interest in the study is based not so much on quantitative demographic distribution of the different ways the programme is received. Rather the central question is *how* these letter-writers experience pleasure or

even displeasure, how they relate to the way in which *Dallas* is presented to the public (Ang, 1985: 11).

Many of those who responded to Ang's advertisement revealed that they found *Dallas* pleasurable because of its realism. From their letters, Ang was able to establish some kind of impression of how they reached this conclusion, or more precisely, which elements of the text they selected which led to its realism at a connotative level (see Ang, 1985). Similarities between meanings emerged in the responses received by Ang, as evidenced in the following letter extracts:

I find *Dallas* super and for this reason: [the characters] reflect the daily life of a family (I find). You sometimes see serials where everything runs smoothly ... Every family has rows sometimes. It's not always smooth sailing. In *Dallas* there are rows, desperate situations. (Letter 3)

Do you know why I like watching it? I think it's because those problems and intrigues, the big and little pleasures and troubles occur in our own lives too... (Letter 4)

You have to see the reality of life, and reality occurs there the way it is in real life too, the intrigues, especially with people living together in the same house (Letter 6) (Ang, 1985: 43-44).

The letters Ang received reflected that even though there are obvious differences between the extravagant lifestyle of



the Ewings at Southfork and the day-to-day domestic environments of most television viewers in the Netherlands, *Dallas* was perceived by the letter writers as taken from life (see Ang, 1985). Whether or not audiences are stirred by *Dallas* depends, of course, on the cultural dispositions that are brought to the text by its readers. In other words, the tragic structure of feeling suggested by *Dallas* will only make sense if one can and will project oneself into, i.e. recognise, a *melodramatic imagination*. Viewers must therefore have a certain cultural competence or orientation to understand and evaluate *Dallas* in a melodramatic way (Ang, 1985: 79).

The 'cultural competence' or 'orientation' referred to by Ang, can extend to *any* culture which has an understanding of how the soap genre operates, which is why soaps are able to transcend cultural barriers so easily. Just as the Dutch viewers analysed by Ang, the students I interviewed, related to both *Generations* and *The Bold* with exactly this kind of 'melodramatic imagination'. One can conclude therefore that the race or culture of the characters on a soap is of very little consequence, as long as it is able to stir emotion in viewers. All of the students I interviewed said that it made no difference to them whether what they were watching was a South African or American production, as evidenced in the following quotes from interviews I conducted with a student by the name of Kholofelo,

Michele: Does it make a difference to you that *The Bold and the Beautiful* is American and *Generations* is South African?

Kholofelo: No, not really.

Michele: Does it make a difference in the way you relate to the characters?

Kholofelo: No. You know, I was watching *Generations* with my younger brother one day and he said to me, "do you realise that *The Bold* and *Generations* are very similar. In *Generations* there is the rich Moroka family and then there is the Forester family on *The Bold* and all the same kinds of things happen to them.

Although Ang's research data was in the form of written responses to the text, and despite the absence of any background material on the correspondents or their contexts of consumption, according to Shaun Moores, Ang's analytical aims were nonetheless in keeping with the broad objectives of reception studies (see Moores, 1995). She may have been severely limited by relying solely on the letters rather than on interview tapes and observational notes, but Ang produced a qualitative interpretation of audience decodings all the same - setting herself the task of explaining viewers engagements and identifications with *Dallas* (Moores, 1995: 43).

#### **David Morley: *The 'Nationwide' Audience***

Ien Ang points out that since its publication in 1980, David Morley's book, *The Nationwide Audience* has played an important role in media studies, particularly in Britain, Western Europe, and Australia. "[N]ot so much because of its inherent 'informational' value, but because of its strategic position in the field of qualitative empirical research on media audiences" (Ang, 1994: 96).

The first phase of the *Nationwide* research project involved a textual analysis of *Nationwide*, a BBC programme which occupied a slot from six to seven o'clock in the British early evening schedule during the 1970s. The analysis involved collective viewing and discussion of the programme over a period of months to establish its recurrent themes and presentational formats, supplemented by a detailed analysis of the internal structure of one particular edition of the programme (see Morley, 1992). By dealing with the specific textual structure of the programme and with empirical investigation of differential interpretations of that same programme material by different groups, Morley and his research team aimed to achieve the following:

we hoped to highlight the nature of the interaction through which audiences produce meanings from the material (words, images) presented to them in the organised form of the text. ... Specifically, the project attempted to relate the analysis of practices of 'decoding' of media material to the theoretical problematic centring on the concept of hegemony. (Morley, 1992: 91)

Morley conducted field research to determine how the media messages his team previously analysed had in fact been received and interpreted by sections of the media audience in different fundamental positions. The research took the following form:

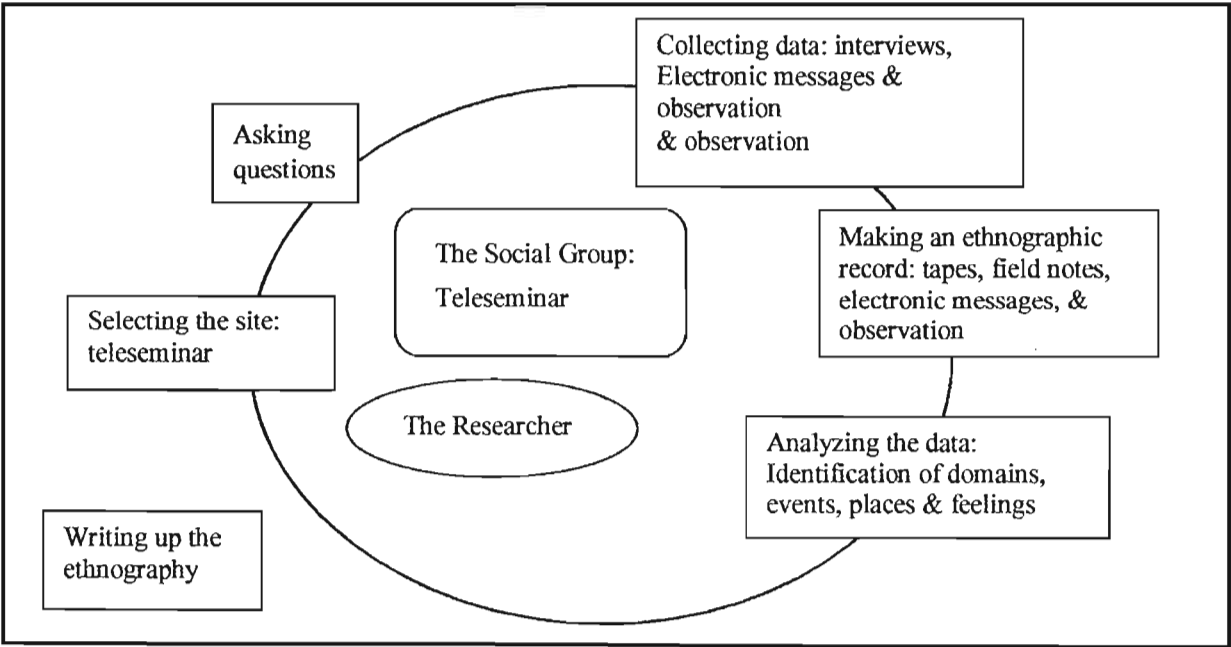
[T]wenty-nine interviews [were] conducted in institutional settings in which groups drawn from

different levels of the education system and from various occupations discussed recorded programme extracts (Moore, 1990: 17).

Morley used Stuart Hall's pattern of the dominant, negotiated and oppositional positions (see Chapter 3). Morley wanted to determine "how the different sub-cultural structures and formations within the audience, and the sharing of different cultural codes and competencies amongst the different groups and classes determine the decoding of the message" (Moore: 1990: 18).

The following diagrammatic representation by Mary Lynn Rice-Lively (1995) of the ethnographic research cycle provides a visual description of how ethnography works in practice (<http://www.gslis.utexas.edu/~marylynn/ethno.html>).

**The Ethnographic Research Cycle**



The *Nationwide* Project was concerned with the ways in which decoding is determined by the socially administered circulation of cultural codes between and across different sections of the audience. Essentially, the range of different decoding strategies and competencies within the audience (Morley, 1992: 57). In brief, the concept of hegemony enabled Morley and his team of researchers to understand the process of meaning-construction as "occurring, within any society, in the context of a set of power relations, in which different groups are competing with one another for the "power to define events and values" (Morley, 1992: 91). Morley's research represented a move away from the focus on psychoanalytic theory in audience studies, to a sociological perspective

If we are to theorise the subject of television, it has to be theorised in its cultural and historical specificity, and area where psychoanalytic theory is obviously weak. It is only thus that we can move beyond a theory of the subject which has reference only to universal, primary psychoanalytic processes, and only thus that we can allow a space in which one can recognise that the struggle over ideology also takes place at the moment of the encounter of text and subject and is not 'always already' predetermined at the psychoanalytic level (Morley, 1992: 71).

According to Morley, the primary concern of the *Nationwide* research project was to link the theoretical question of the maintenance of hegemony with the empirical question of how a

particular programme acts to 'prefer' one set of meanings and definitions of events (see Morley, 1992).

The *Nationwide* research project was also aimed at investigating the different forms of negotiation and resistance that *Nationwide* elicited from different groups - i.e. to explore the degree to which the 'hegemonic' definitions articulated by the programme were taken up by the audience. Thus the project was concerned with the conditions under which oppositional meanings were produced within the communicative exchanges initiated by the programme (see Morley, 1992).

Morley and his research team showed video recordings of two *Nationwide* programmes to a range of groups from very divergent social backgrounds and interviewed them to establish their interpretations of the programmes. The first programme was shown to eighteen groups drawn from different social and cultural backgrounds. The second video recording of *Nationwide* was shown to eleven groups, again, from different social and cultural backgrounds. The groups were mainly of between five and ten people. After the viewing of the videotape, the subsequent discussion was tape-recorded (generally being approximately thirty minutes in duration). These audiotapes were later transcribed to provide the basic data for the analysis (see Morley:1992).

According to Ien Ang, the *Nationwide* research project has generally been received as

[A]n innovative departure within cultural studies, both theoretically and methodologically ... Morley's project is an indication of a growing acknowledgement within Cultural

Studies that television viewing is a practice that involves the active production of meanings by viewers" (Ang, 1994: 100).

### **The viewer as critic**

Liebes and Katz state that the Americans they interviewed in their study on *Dallas* showed a greater ability to make sense of metalinguistic statements of all kinds than the other groups (including Russians, Moroccans and Israelis). They were, according to the researchers, the only ones who showed interest in, or awareness of, the business aspects of soap production, "they are the most sensitive of all groups about the nuances of genre and why *Dallas* is and is not a soap opera, and how and why it compares with its several spin-offs" (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 216).

The students I interviewed displayed a sophisticated knowledge of the soap genre based on the years they had spent watching American soaps on television, with the result that they judged *Generations* by the 'standards' set by its American counterparts. Even though their knowledge of soaps did not extend to the production processes and business aspects of the genre, as that of the American respondents interviewed by Liebes and Katz, their knowledge of what the characteristics of soap opera are, is extensive. Portia, a female student, picked up on the fact that *Generations* has included elements of humour in its formula which is not typical of the genre.

Portia: *Generations* is funny, sometimes it's more like a comedy than a soapie.

## The Tubingen Soap Opera Project

The *Nationwide* research project served as a model for another study, undertaken by Ellen Seiter, Hans Borchers, Gabriele Kreutzner and Eva-Maria Warth, the details of which are contained in a paper entitled "*Don't treat us like we're so stupid and naive*": *Toward an ethnography of soap opera viewers*. Between July 21 and August 16, 1986, the Tubingen Soap Opera Project team conducted twenty-six ethnographic interviews with viewers in the Eugene\Springfield metropolitan area of western Oregon, an area which is characterised by high unemployment (see Seiter et al, 1994).

Each interview was carried out by two scholars, of whom at least one was German, for the benefit of the German members of the research team. Fifteen all-women groups were visited by a female research team. All of the informants used in the study were white, and among the sixty-four participants, fifteen were men. Eleven informants were unemployed at the time of the interview. Seiter et al are of the opinion that the large number of unemployed men and women in their pool reflects their technique for contacting informants - to run an advertisement in the 'Help Wanted' section of the Eugene newspaper - and also reflects the economic depression which characterises the region (see Seiter et al, 1994).

Because of the tendency in this kind of academic research to deal with predominantly middle-class informants, and because of [their] interest in working-class readings of soap operas, [Seiter et al.] welcomed this composition of [their] informant pool" (Seiter et al, 1994: 225).



They conceded however, that they found their failure to contact any men and women of colour for the interviews as a serious limitation of the study (see Seiter et al, 1994).

The groups ranged in size from two to nine participants. The interviews took place at one informant's home, in the company of friends and family members she had chosen for the interview. Seiter et al make the following claim about the nature of the interviews:

[w]hile some audience studies hire interviewers who are not involved later in the analysis of the transcripts and tapes, we remained within the boundaries of the ethnographic method in that all of the interviews were carried out by the four primary researchers on the project (Seiter et al., 1994: 227).

The Tübingen study focused on the entire genre of soap opera, which distinguishes it from other soap opera audience studies, which tend to focus a specific show or a single episode (see Seiter et al, 1994). Seiter et al. found from the interviews they conducted that the pleasure their informants derived from the fictionality of soap opera texts did not prevent them from getting personally involved in the texts - and by extension, from experiencing soap operas as texts which are relevant to social reality. Ellen Seiter and her colleagues found, in an interview with a group of four viewers, the following attitudes toward the soap opera text.

The relationship between viewer and character more typically involved hostility - in the case of some of the presumably sympathetic characters - as well

as fond admiration - for the supposedly despised villainesses. ... Sympathy for characters was mentioned only rarely, while outrage, anger, criticism, or refusal to accept a character's problems was frequently expressed. The women [Seiter et al.] interviewed showed a conscious, full-fledged refusal of the narrative's demand for sympathy and understanding. (Seiter et al, 1994: 238)

Contemporary audience studies conducted by David Morley and Ann Gray in Britain have found women to speak "defensively and self-deprecatingly with regard to their [television viewing] choices and preferences"<sup>5</sup> (Seiter et al, 1994: 242). In comparison with Morley and Gray's findings, Seiter and the other researchers on the Tübingen Project found that their interviews showed no explicitly apologetic overtones. According to Seiter et al. this non-defensive position about television viewing "was held most strongly in interviews conducted in groups where all the participants (informants and interviewers) were women - fifteen of the twenty-six interviews" (Seiter et al, 1994: 242). Seiter and her research team point out that this indicates

the importance of situating the decoding of television programmes within the context of concrete social exchanges, among subjects whose histories determine the interaction and the kind of discourses which will be used (Seiter et al, 1994: 242).

An account of the research undertaken by Marie Gillespie in Britain, sheds further light on ethnographic audience research.

### **The Southall Project**

Marie Gillespie, in her book entitled *Television, Ethnicity and Cultural Change*, documents the audience research she undertook amongst young people in Southall (west London), a predominantly Asian area. Gillespie's study is based on data collected during two years of fieldwork carried out from 1988-1991. During the period of the fieldwork, Gillespie lived with young adults of a Punjabi family background. During her fieldwork, Gillespie investigated the responses of Southall residents to a variety of televisual texts. One facet of Gillespie's extensive ethnographic audience response study involved investigating the viewing experiences of Southall teenagers who watched the Australian soap opera, *Neighbours*. Gillespie conducted in-depth interviews with Southall youth, in an effort to gain some kind of understanding of their viewing experiences, and how these experiences were incorporated into their everyday lives (see Gillespie, 1995). Gillespie concluded the following from the interviews she conducted with Southall teenagers about their experiences watching *Neighbours*:

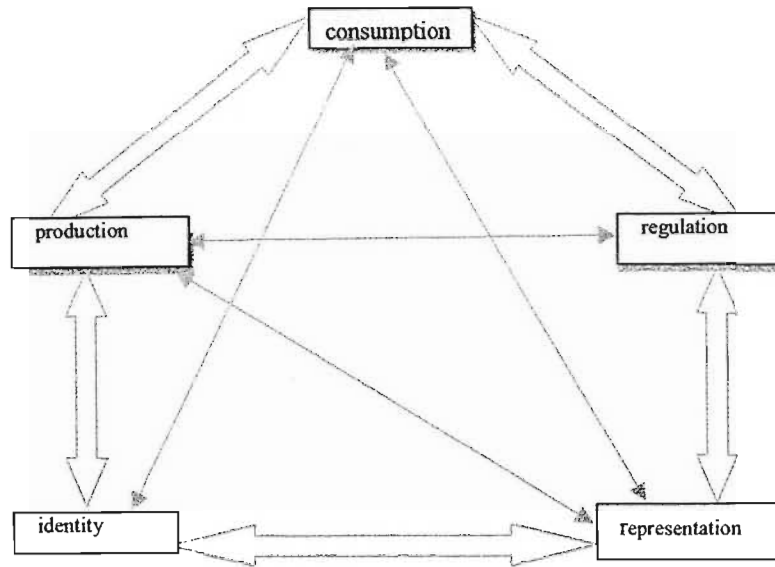
Television as an object and a social experience is embedded in family life, and family relationships are expressed in and through the viewing situation. Soaps bring alternative sets of social behaviour and moral values into the heart of the domestic life. In Southall, soap viewing has

become a domestic, antagonistic ritual which involves defining and redefining relationships with 'others' both absent and present: from the characters on the screen, who constitute a televisual presence, to the wider audience, an absent but implied cultural referent; from parents and the local 'community', to siblings and peers (Gillespie, 1995: 98).

### **'The Circuit of Culture'**

The 'new' audience studies (as discussed in Chapter 3) used primarily qualitative methods in order to determine the influence of contextual and cultural factors on understanding media reception. The new approach to audience studies also saw a broader range of contributing factors in the viewing process investigated. A notion that I found particularly useful for the purposes of this thesis, is that of the 'circuit of culture' (Hall and du Gay *et al*, 1997). The circuit is depicted in diagrammatic form below:

### The circuit of culture



What makes the cultural circuit so invaluable is that it views the act of media consumption in the context of everyday life. All the stages in the circuit are inextricably linked.

In the anthology *Consumption and Everyday Life* (1997), Mackay and the other contributing authors "focus on *active* consumers and their *local* practices, rather than the broader forces and processes by which globalisation can be characterised". Mackay points out that in debates on cultural production there is an *implied* consumer. They are concerned with "the intersection of the global and the local", with a greater emphasis on "the practices of everyday life, on the 'local' side of the story" (Mackay, 1997: 2). This idea was crucial in compiling the research for this thesis, as it was my intention to focus on the very

specific way in which the students consume *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*.

Mackay also notes that 'consumption' often has negative connotations associated with it based on its dictionary definition which is "using up; destruction, waste, amount consumed" (Mackay, 1997: 2), but for the purposes of his book (and this thesis) it is viewed as an active process associated with pleasure. "[C]onsumption today is not seen by social scientists as corrupting, nor are consumers seen as the passive victims of capitalism" (Mackay, 1997: 3). Consumption practices are socially structured, therefore "[e]mpirical, qualitative research on the everyday appropriation of cultural artefacts is precisely the focus of subculture theorists and others who have explored "the pleasures of consumption" (Mackay, 1997: 5). The daily viewing patterns and routines of the students I interviewed were crucial to the analysis of their viewing experiences. Given that they live in residences on the university campus and attend classes during the day, their lives are governed by routine and set social practices. The fact that they watch television as part of a group is a part of their social routine.

### **'Everyday life'**

In the introduction to *Consumption and Everyday Life* (1997), MacKay defines what is meant by 'everyday life', a definition which proved very useful in the context of this thesis, which also seeks to examine consumption in the everyday lives of the students interviewed. He defines 'everyday life' as being concerned with "the unpredictable,

the improvised and with the routine activities and control of ordinary people as they go about their day-to-day lives" (Mackay, 1997: 7). The term can be used in several ways, but Mackay's definition above is the one applicable to this thesis. Crucial to the interviews I conducted was getting a sense of what the 'everyday' lives of the students were like and how their viewing of *The Bold* and *Generations* fitted into their daily lives.

It became clear from the interviews that the students scheduled both soaps into their daily routines with care. The soaps were clearly viewed as part of their leisure and relaxation time - an escape from the stresses of the daily routine. The following quote from an interview with a student called Sibusiso, illustrates this.

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Sibusiso: I am usually cooking when *The Bold* is on, but at least three times a week I make sure that I watch it!

Michele: Why do you watch *Generations*?

Sibusiso: Sometimes there are things that happen in *Generations* that I don't like, then there are things that happen in *The Bold* that I do like and visa versa. Mostly, I watch both when I feel stressed. I go there [the TV room] to take my studies out of my mind.

Sibusiso's routine is fairly rigid, but he makes sure that he fits his soap viewing in.

Seiter et al studied soap viewers located in Oregon in the USA. The researchers describe how soap operas serve to organize time in the context of everyday life (Seiter et al, 1994: 227). Although their research is focused on housewives, I found as illustrated above, that it is just as much a way of scheduling daily activities as it is for the housewives in Oregon.

MacKay states that the studies presented in his book have "a particular concern with place, and with the local articulation of global cultural processes" (MacKay, 1997: 12). Given that the partial focus of this thesis is the consumption of an American soap opera in a uniquely South African context, the 'local articulation' of the soap is of the utmost importance. The students illustrated that they had integrated *The Bold and the Beautiful* into their own lived experiences and frames of reference, appropriating it for use in this context. An example of this from the interviews, is the way that the students appropriated information from *The Bold* and put it into practice in their own lives. Many of the students said that the soap gave them insight into romantic relationships. The male students in particular, commented on the fact that the soap provides ideas on courtship rituals designed to impress women. A male student called Hlengiwe had the following to say:

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold*?

Hlengiwe: I enjoy the things that happen in it very much.

Michele: Can you give me an example of the kind of things you like?



Hlengiwe: Like Ridge having to choose between two women and the way Stephanie [his mother] acts. I wouldn't want my mother to judge me the way Stephanie judges her son. It's not nice that your mother can choose your girlfriend for you and say which one she thinks is wrong or right the way that Stephanie does with Brooke and Taylor. She also gives the impression that she loves Ridge more than Thorne [Ridge's brother].

Another male student, Siyabonga, had the following to say:

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold*?

Siyabonga: I watch it to look at what the world is really like. When you look at things in *The Bold* you find out about things in life you haven't experienced yet - it prepares you for how to handle these things if they should ever happen in your life.

An indicator of how *The Bold and the Beautiful* has been integrated into the lives of the students, is the fact that they measure all other soap opera offerings against *The Bold*, which has been a part of their lives for well over ten years.

Students also expressed the fact that *The Bold* provides them with a glimpse into an American way of life, like a student by the name of Jimmy, who gave the following reason for watching *The Bold and the Beautiful*:

Jimmy: Basically in light of what is happening globally *The Bold* shows me what is going on in other parts of the world. I want to see their lifestyle and compare it to the way we live in South Africa.

Americans would probably be appalled if they knew that foreigners were making value judgements on the American way of life based on what they see on a soap like *The Bold*, but this is never the less the case. Both *The Bold* and *Generations* construct fictional worlds for their viewers, who in turn, make these fantasy worlds a part of their own reality to varying degrees.

Liebes and Katz in their study of the ways in which different cultural groups viewed *Dallas*, discuss what they call the 'pragmatic criticism' engaged in by viewers. They define this criticism as an awareness "of the nature and causes of involvement in the semantics and syntactics" (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 216). They note the fact that the respondents in their study, particularly the American groups, commented on the 'naturalness' of the characters in *Dallas*.

It is this awareness of that the characters are acting 'themselves' - that it is very difficult to separate character from actor in the ubiquitous genre of soap opera - that puts people in this particular kind of critical mood (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 217).

This was evident in the interviews I conducted with the students, they could not distinguish between the actors on

*The Bold and the Beautiful* and the characters they play. None of the students knew the real names of the actors, they only thought of them in character, as discussed previously.

The point of the kind of pragmatic criticism engaged in by soap viewers is, according to Liebes and Katz, that it "connects reflexively between the text and the readers' definition of their own roles" (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 217). Viewers are also aware, according to Liebes and Katz, of the "way in which their involvement [in a soap opera] may result from the similarities between family problems in the story and family problems of their own" (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 217). The students I interviewed were aware of this dynamic in their viewing of both *The Bold* and *Generations*. The following interview quote from Nhlanhla, a male student serves as an example.

Michele: Do you know anyone in your own life who reminds you of any of the characters on *The Bold*?

Nhlanhla: My girlfriend reminds me of Brooke. She behaves like Brooke in most cases. She knows how to get me to do things. I tell her I can't do something and then she will come and kiss me and do all those things - just like Brooke.

Michele: Do you know anyone in your own life who reminds you of any of the characters on *Generations*?

Nhlanhla: No, I can't think of any.

Although there were students who cited examples of characters who reminded them of people in their own lives, they generally had to think harder and longer about examples from *Generations*. Nhlanhla said that he was less involved in

*Generations* than with *The Bold and the Beautiful* because he felt that the acting on *Generations* was less convincing than that on *The Bold*.

The reasons students gave for watching *The Bold* generally indicated that they were motivated to watch because they felt the soap could teach them how to handle situations in their own lives, and that they could identify with the experiences of the characters. Their continued involvement with *Generations* however, is an indication that the producers have managed to come up with engrossing stories to keep the viewers interested.

### **Filling in the gaps**

Liebes and Katz found a pattern in their interviews which indicated that

soap opera texts are the products not of individual and isolated readings, but of collective constructions - collaborative readings, as it were, of small social groups such as families, friends and neighbours, or people sharing an apartment. Most viewers report that they have made it a habit to rely on other people in order to compensate for gaps in their comprehension (Liebes and Katz, 1994: 233).

The respondents in my study, showed the same pattern as that described by Liebes and Katz, in that most of them said that if they missed an episode of *Generations* or *The Bold*, they relied on friends to fill them in, as evidenced described in

the following interview quote with a female student called Vicky.

Michele: If you have missed an episode of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, how do you go about finding out what happened?

Vicky: My friends will tell me. They come to my room and say "Vicky, do you know what happened on *The Bold*?" and they tell me. If they don't come to me, I'll go over to them and discuss it.

Michele: What about with *Generations*?

Vicky: It's the same as with *The Bold*. I have one friend though who tells me every little bit of detail until I get bored!

Another means of accessing information on *The Bold* and *Generations* favoured by the students, is the Internet and magazines. Nhlanhla, a male student, discusses this

Michele: If you missed an episode of *The Bold*, how do you go about finding out what happened?

Nhlanhla: Sometimes I go to the Internet, or I watch the replay on TV the morning after if it doesn't clash with any of my lectures.

The following chapter discusses the production processes behind soap operas.

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## Chapter 6

### Production

Any television program is a negotiated product, the outcome of a production process with many moments at which meaning and execution can be contested and resolved through compromise among members of a team of craftspeople, each operating through the prism of his or her own skill and experience (McEachern, 1994: 81).

This chapter will explore the production processes behind the making of a soap opera as well as comparatively examine the production of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*. "The American soap opera is defined by its three boundaries - the hour and frequency of its broadcast, the economics of its construction, and the audience it attracts" (Comstock, 1983: xxiii). This chapter is concerned specifically with the first and second of these 'boundaries'.

In many studies on soap opera audiences, the roles of production and authorship have been marginalised. Jostein Gripsrud is of the opinion that this marginalisation is due largely to "the 'postmodern' mood of much cultural and literary criticism since the late 1970s" (Gripsrud, 1995: 23). Gripsrud argues that in postmodernism's effort to debunk modernism and its so-called 'grand narratives', a kind of 'homological' thinking has evolved, which in effect

"places Marx's privileging of production over consumption as just another instance of male bourgeois ideology" (Gripsrud, 1995: 23). According to Gripsrud:

He [Marx] also metaphorically foreshadows a fundamental idea in literary reception theory when pointing out that 'a railway on which no train runs, hence which is not used up, not consumed' is a railway only potentially. Still, what he concludes is that even if consumption and production are 'moments of one process', production is 'the point of departure for realisation and hence also its predominant moment; it is the act through which the whole process again runs its course. (Gripsrud, 1995: 23)

Though this point may seem abstract and as if it has nothing to do with the consumption of soap opera, the opposite is in fact true. What Gripsrud does in examining the consumption of the prime time soap *Dynasty* in Norway, is to make the connection between the production of the soap in America and its consumption in Norway. " the production of *Dynasty* in Hollywood, [was] rooted in circumstances specific to the competition in the American TV industry for American markets, a logical precondition of any consumption of the product in Norway (and some ninety other countries)" (Gripsrud, 1995: 24).

Even though *Dynasty* is classified as a 'prime time' soap as opposed to a 'daily soap' (*Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*), Gripsrud raises many salient issues in relation to its production process which are relevant to the daily soaps under discussion in this thesis, particularly *Generations*, which straddles both genres. The essential differences between a prime time soap and a daily soap, (to use Comstock's defining framework again) lie in the time and frequency of broadcast and the production budget. Prime time soaps are traditionally screened only once a week in what is considered a prime viewing slot. In South Africa, this would be roughly between 8pm and 9:30pm in the evenings. The hour between 7pm and 8pm is classified as 'family viewing' i.e. suitable for the whole family to view.

The prime time slot is considered suitable for more adult viewing. One of the interesting features of *Generations* is that when it was first broadcast in 1994, it was classified by virtue of the time and frequency of its broadcast as a prime time soap, as it was broadcast once a week in a prime viewing slot. This brings me to the second distinguishing feature of the prime time soap: production cost. Traditionally, these soaps have a far higher production budget than their poor relatives, the daily soaps. Prime time soaps are often shot in studio as well as on location at great expense. The average length of an episode of a prime time soap is 45 minutes to an hour, as opposed to the daily soap which has an average length of 25-30 minutes. As



far as quality and standard of production went, *Generations* was never in the same league as its American counterparts like *Dynasty* and *Dallas*. It always had the 'feel' of a daily soap despite the broadcast slot. *Generations* was also always shorter than a conventional prime time soap, as each episode was 30 minutes long (including advertisements).

In 1998, *Generations* went from being a once weekly broadcast to being broadcast four times a week, from Tuesday to Friday. *Generations* was now truly in the throes of an identity crisis, as it tried to combine a daily soap structure with a prime time viewing slot. Daily soaps are conventionally screened five days a week, from Monday and Friday.

The importance of scheduling cannot be over-estimated when analysing viewership figures. Dorothy Hobson makes this point in her research into the production of the long-running British soap opera, *Crossroads*. She quotes David Glencross, Deputy Director of Television at the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) in Britain who had the following to say with regard to the high ratings *Crossroads* consistently achieved:

Despite its ratings success any program must also rely on where it is placed in the evening schedule. At the time *Crossroads* is screened BBC has not started putting out its strongest

programs and BBC2 is still showing Open University (Hobson, 1982: 42).

Hobson notes that the IBA in Britain was critical of *Crossroads*, and from Glencross's statement above, it is clear that he believed that a large contributing factor in the soap's success, is the fact that it WAS screened at a time when there was comparatively little else on to compete for viewers. The same cannot be said of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. At the time *The Bold and the Beautiful* is aired at 6pm on SABC1, it is competing with the national magazine program, *South Africa Today* on SABC2, which provides information on national news and events; *National Enquirer: Uncovered*, an American half hour show which provides gossip on the rich and famous on SABC3; the long running local soap, *Egoli* on M-Net's open time<sup>1</sup> and the *Oprah* show on the free-to-air channel, e-TV. It is thus competing for viewers with another South African daily soap, and on the other three channels with programs that are aired daily and it still manages to maintain its place in the top ten most popular shows on SABC.

*Generations* on the other hand, is up against a news bulletin on SABC3, a feature film, sitcom, weekly prime time soap or mini series, (depending on the night of the week) on M-Net (for subscribers only), sitcoms, drama or police series' on e-TV, again varying from day to day. On

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<sup>1</sup> M-Net is a pay-channel. 'Open Time' is a two hour free viewing window, which is open to all viewers, even non-subscribers.

SABC2, it competes with various drama and police series' and a magazine programme on a Friday. Even though the news pulls in a large numbers of viewers, there is no similar long-running daily show to compete with *Generations*. This is not to say that the only reason for *Generations*' popularity is the time slot in which it is shown, but it is, however a large contributing factor which the SABC chooses to downplay in its bid to promote local content programming.

### **The economics of soap opera production and scheduling**

There are numerous factors which need to be considered when analysing the production process of a daily soap. Richard Kilborn points to one of these as being that they are generally produced by or for large broadcasting institutions or companies and will therefore be subject to various institutional constraints and influences (Kilborn, 1992: 51). These range from:

What funds are initially made available to start a project, to what niche it is envisaged the program will occupy in a particular broadcasting schedule, or what production resources - in the form of studio and technical facilities - can be allocated on a fairly long-term basis (Kilborn, 1992: 51).

*Generations*, was commissioned by the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) in 1993/1994, a monumental period in South Africa's history. 1994 saw the country's first democratic election. South Africa was in a time of transition and change, and the SABC wanted to create a series that reflected a side of life and characters which had never been portrayed on South African television before: young professional black people. Before *Generations* the only roles available to black actors on SA TV were those of servant, political activist or criminal. The new class of young professional black people which was emerging in the country had not yet been reflected on our television screens.

According to Mfundu Vundla, who was one of the original team of script writers on the soap and who now produces it, the original brief from the SABC demanded a soap that would show black South Africans in a new light, reflecting their changing image. When it was first broadcast, once weekly, the soap was shot over a period of three months with a total of 52 episodes being recorded in this period. Now that it is screened four times a week, however, the production schedule is far more extensive, running throughout the year.

The reasons for the SABC choosing a soap as their vehicle for delivering the image of the 'new' South Africa were largely economic. From a broadcaster or producer's point of view, the most significant appeal of the soap opera medium

is its proven success as a formula. Even though the initial financial outlay for the production of a soap can be considerable:

There are also good prospects for a healthy return on this initial investment. One need only look to the Lorimar Company in the United States and the Grundy organization in Australia to see what large profits can be made from a continuing involvement in soap production. (Kilborn, 1992: 17)

The Grundy organization referred to by Kilborn is responsible for the production of *Neighbours*, which has not only been hugely popular in Australia, but also in numerous other parts of the world including Britain and South Africa. Unlike certain other types of television programming, soaps have universal appeal and "export sales can therefore often be part of the economic calculation in the initial decision to commit resources to the production of a continuing drama" (Kilborn, 1992: 17).

When I interviewed Mfundu Vundla in 1997, he was negotiating the export of *Generations* to Kenya, Zimbabwe among others. He also mentioned that he planned to go the same route as *M-Net's* long running daily soap, *Egoli* and obtain sponsorship from business concerns for the show to offset the production costs. Since the interview, he has

done just that. He has organised the sponsorship of one of the country's two major cellular telephone networks, *Vodacom*. This is an indication of the popularity of the show, particularly among young black viewers. *Vodacom* is using *Generations* as a vehicle to reach this huge potential market.

The garnering of advertising sponsorship for soaps is a worldwide trend, as Kilborn points out:

Whether or not the broadcasters produce their own drama programs or screen bought-in material, most soap operas have established themselves as trusty 'bankers' so far as generating high audience ratings is concerned. Even relatively low-budget productions can sometimes be remarkably successful if they succeed in becoming a cult phenomenon with more specialist audiences. For the companies operating in the independent/commercial sector, this means that a premium rate can be charged for advertising in the slots before, during and immediately after the screening of a popular soap. In this respect soaps play a significant role in ensuring that the flow of advertising revenue - the economic lifeblood of the independent/commercial operation - is maximized. (Kilborn, 1992: 17)

Even though the SABC is by definition, a public broadcaster, it has had increasing financial pressure in the last few years, particularly with the increasing popularity of the pay channel, M-Net and the recent introduction of satellite television, through M-Net and the advent of the free-to-air channel, e-TV. The SABC is dependent on the payment of TV licenses as well as advertising revenue for its existence. A culture of non-payment has developed around the payment of TV licenses as viewers have become increasingly dissatisfied with the programming on offer. The SABC has tried to combat this with an intensive advertising campaign to promote payment.

A soap like *Generations*, is therefore of immense value to the SABC, and as such it has spent a great deal of money on the promotion of the soap. Billboards depicting characters from the show stand as beacons along major highways, and a series of television advertisements around the show are broadcast daily. The SABC has also cashed in on the popularity of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and, at one point, landed major sponsorship from a chocolate manufacturer, *Quality Street*.

What makes a soap opera so profitable is its "ability to attract and hold what is, in advertising terms, a quality audience - women between the ages of eighteen and fifty-four" (Allen, 1987: 142). As television soaps are one of the most reliable means of attracting a loyal audience

numbering multi-millions, a great deal of attention is given to their scheduling times. One of the factors in determining this, is to establish who comprises the audience. Daily soaps are conventionally scheduled in morning or late afternoon/early evening slots. *The Bold and the Beautiful* has shifted time slots in the last few years, and is currently broadcast at 6pm every evening on SABC 1 and re-broadcast in the mornings at 9am. As mentioned previously, it is almost unprecedented anywhere in the world for a daily soap to occupy a prime time slot as *Generations* does. By virtue of its time slot, it has access to a far greater viewing audience than *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which is an important factor to consider when analysing its high viewership. Despite its earlier time slot, *The Bold and the Beautiful* consistently appears in the top ten programs (see Appendix 1).

#### **The cost of producing a daily soap**

The start-up costs of producing a daily soap as stated previously, are high, but in the long term soaps are relatively cheap to produce. The reasons for this are not difficult to understand. It is far more expensive to produce a drama series than a soap, as each new self-contained episode of a drama series requires a substantial financial investment in new sets and costumes, whereas soaps are shot predominantly on fixed sets, which are not often altered. The longer a soap runs, the more economical



it is for the producers, as they get the maximum amount of mileage out of their initial financial investment (Kilborn, 1992).

Soaps have become almost synonymous with low budget productions which are deficient in various respects, including acting, scripting or technical management:

In the early years of television serials, for instance, parts of the flimsy studio sets always appeared to be on the verge of collapsing and the whole soap opera 'world' seemed to be characterized by a distinct lack of solidity (Kilborn, 1992: 57).

The notion of soaps as being characterised by shoddy production standards has persisted over the years and is often applied to soaps indiscriminately. One cannot help but think that it has been used by critics as a general tactic for devaluing or making fun of what they perceive to be "a highly dubious and addictive form of entertainment" (Kilborn, 1992: 57). During the course of the interviews conducted with students who watch *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, the general perception amongst them seemed to be that the quality of the production of *The Bold and the Beautiful* was superior to that of *Generations*. The features which many singled out for criticism, were the acting and the wardrobe, as indicated in the following

quote from Siyabonga: "As far as acting is concerned, I think we [South Africans] haven't come very far. As far as the production is concerned compared to *The Bold* I wouldn't say it's [Generations] bad, but I think there is room for improvement and we have to understand that it's a South African soapie, and we don't have the resources that the Americans have". As was the case in many of the interviews, informants were anxious to qualify their criticism and make allowances for the South African soap opera.

The cost of producing a soap locally is considerably higher than importing one. It costs between R5000,00 and R6000,00 per minute to produce *Generations*, whereas it costs approximately only R500,00 per minute to broadcast the American imported soap, *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The reason that it is comparatively cheap to import American soaps, is that shows that are successful in the USA have usually already earned more than enough to pay for production costs, "which means prices in foreign markets can be kept surprisingly low, adjusted to the financial possibilities of different customers" (Gripsrud, 1995: 25). The argument for making soaps locally when it is so much cheaper to import them from America, is the importance of fostering local talent in the various spheres involved in the production of television programs, as well as to provide audiences with shows that reflect issues relevant to the South African context.

The SABC is obliged by the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) to have a minimum of 20% of its drama programming locally produced. Local is not automatically more popular however, which leaves the SABC in a potentially precarious position financially, given the comparatively high cost of producing a local drama series or soap opera. This would explain why the SABC has allocated a prime slot to the locally produced *Generations*, and why it has launched such a vigorous advertising campaign to promote the soap, creating audience awareness in the hopes of increasing viewership and, consequently, advertisers, to offset the substantial production costs. This campaign appears to have worked where *Generations* is concerned. The Television Audience Measurement Survey formerly known as AMPS METERS survey released in 1998 by the South African Advertising Research Foundation (SAARF), revealed that *Generations* features in the top ten favorite programmes amongst adult and young viewers along with *The Bold and the Beautiful* (see Appendix 2). As mentioned previously, the latter soap occupies a far earlier time slot, and is still able to compete with *Generations* in the viewing stakes, which speaks volumes for its popularity. The SABC also does not aggressively market *The Bold and the Beautiful* as it does *Generations*, which makes *The Bold and the Beautiful* substantially more profitable.

Gripsrud warns of the dangers of neglecting factors of economic, political and cultural power which impact on the

production process when investigating "the apparent ease with which American television programs cross cultural and linguistic frontiers" (Liebes and Katz, 1986:187 in Gripsrud, 1995: 26). He is critical of the work conducted by Liebes and Katz into the consumption of the American prime time soap, *Dallas* in various parts of the world and its rapid diffusion and immense popularity in countries like Israel. According to Gripsrud:

In Katz and Liebes's project the explanation for the 'diffusion' of US television is only sought for in the interactive relationship between viewers and text. They do not ask why the text is there to be interacted with in the first place...*Dallas* is credited by Liebes and Katz with the capacity to stimulate the imagination and social interaction of different audiences. But without the power of production as part of the interpretive framework, it is impossible to ask, for instance, if other kinds of production might not only stimulate audience activities in a similar way, but also provide a form of entertainment which would address the viewers' lives more specifically, with a different influence on their way of looking at their conditions of existence (Gripsrud, 1995 :26).

The basis of Gripsrud's critique of Liebes and Katz's work is his belief that many audience researchers, when

examining the popularity of American programs throughout the world, ignore the production process in their analysis. Gripsrud would have us believe that the only reason so many American shows enjoy popularity universally is because of the proliferation of these shows due to their comparatively cheap import cost. His implication is that locally produced shows may be just as appealing to audiences and provide them with alternative ways of looking at their lives. This assertion carries an implicit bias against American shows, and infers that American television has a negative influence on viewers. This assertion proves more than a little dubious in relation to *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The assumption that simply because a program is produced locally it must be a better influence on viewers proves to be without foundation as far as these two soaps are concerned. All the interviewees indicated that the subject matter and approach of these two soaps were remarkably similar. Some even went so far as to say that they felt that *Generations* is simply a cheap imitation of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. According to Nhlanhla, a third year electrical engineering student, when compared with *The Bold*, "*Generations* is unprofessional".

### **The production process behind *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations***

Producing a daily soap opera is a complex and intriguing process and *The Bold and the Beautiful* is no exception. The

soap's creators, William J. Bell and Lee Phillip Bell have enjoyed a long and illustrious career in the competitive world of television soap opera production. They were responsible for the creation of one of America's longest running soaps, *The Young and the Restless*, which premiered in 1973, and is still going strong.

The production of *The Bold and the Beautiful* is a family affair for the Bells. They used the soap as a means of introducing their children into the business. As their son Bradley said "What my dad had in mind was using the new series as a learning tool for all of us so that we could understand what it took to put a show on the air" (*The Bold and the Beautiful: A tenth anniversary celebration*<sup>1</sup>, 1996). In the Christmas of 1985 the Bells spent ten days in a hotel room brainstorming ideas for the new series. They wanted to ensure that the new soap would not be perceived as a spin-off of *The Young and the Restless*, so it was imperative that it have its own identity and personality. The first two characters they conceived of were the wealthy Eric and Stephanie Forester, a middle-aged couple with children, whose marriage was in trouble. As the Bells knew from their many years in the industry, the standard soap formula requires that if you have a wealthy family then you also need a family of much lesser economic advantage. It was for this reason that they created the Logans, a single parent lower middle-class family.

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<sup>1</sup> The book was only available on audio cassette, so it is not possible to provide page references.

The Bells submitted a 36-page draft of their concept to CBS, an American television network. They loved it and wanted the series ready for production within a year. This presented the Bells with a daunting task, but they were up for the challenge. Unlike *The Young and the Restless* which was jointly produced by Columbia Television and the Bells, *The Bold and the Beautiful* was to be entirely produced by a brand new production company created by the Bells: Bell Phillip Television Productions Incorporated. The Bells relocated to Los Angeles from Chicago to facilitate the production of the new series. It was en route to L.A. that Bill Jr. suggested using the fashion industry as a backdrop for the show.

Once they arrived at their new home in Los Angeles. Bill wrote the story bible for *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Bill decided that the show's working title, *Rags*, was too irreverent. He came up with a new title, *The Bold and the Beautiful*, which better captured the essence of the fashion industry.

The story behind the creation of *Generations* differs from that of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. It was commissioned by the SABC, South Africa's national public broadcaster, at an important juncture in the country's history. The country's first democratic elections had been held and it was a time of major transition and change. The SABC was looking for a dramatic series that would reflect these changes, and so, *Generations* was born. Its creators knew that their task was

to make a show which portrayed South Africans of all races interacting with one another. In other words, it depicted what, at that time, was an *ideal* reality, rather than a reflection of an *actual* reality. *Generations* was groundbreaking in many ways, the most important of which being that it was the first multi-racial drama series on the SABC which revolved around powerful and wealthy black characters. Prior to *Generations*, all drama series' screened on SABC with black lead characters were in African languages. *Generations* was pioneering in that its predominant language is English (when other languages are used, the dialogue is subtitled in English).

The inspiration for *Generations* came from one of the show's producers (originally involved in the script writing and original story bible for the show), Mfundi Vundla, who used his brother as his muse. Vundla's brother headed up the first black owned advertising agency in the country, and hence the idea of using two competing advertising agencies owned by two rival wealthy black families as a backdrop for *Generations* was born. Though the one family has since all but disappeared from the show, the Morokas have remained behind, and Isis (rival agency) is still New Horizons' (owned by the Morokas) arch enemy.

According to Vundla, the show is based largely on the American soap opera model. Unlike the Bells, who had extensive experience in the field of writing and producing soap operas, Vundla and the rest of the show's writers and producers had little or no experience in the field when



they embarked on the project. Vundla asserts that his only experience prior to getting involved in *Generations* was derived from reading on the subject of soap opera production. This has not however stood in the way of their coming up with a winning formula.

In the original series, inter-racial conflict and relationships featured prominently. This is no longer the case. The emphasis appears to have shifted, and the primary focus is on entertainment according to Elsje Starck, another of the show's producers. This would appear to reflect changes that have happened in the country over the last five years. The original brief to the writers to depict black South Africans in a positive light to reflect their changing image while at the same time showing close interaction between black and white characters, still underlies *Generations*, but the emphasis has shifted from racial conflict to harmony. Characters of all races co-exist and the emphasis is now on universal human issues (love, hate, revenge etc.), and the race of the characters is less relevant.

### **Naming and creating the characters**

Almost as much thought goes into the naming of a cast of characters as there does into the naming of a new-born child by its parents. According to Bill Bell names are not always easy to come by. Bell wanted the names of the Foresters to represent youth, wealth and power. Often

characters are named with specific people or an image in mind. Eric Forester for example, was partly modeled on the well known fashion designer Bill Blass. Other character names come to the writer by less scientific means. The inspiration for the name Ridge Forester for example, came from a childhood friend of one of the Bell's sons. Bill Bell apparently joked with the youngster about liking the name 'Ridge', and promised to name a character after him one day. With the advent of *The Bold and Beautiful*, the opportunity to use the name arose.

An additional factor on *Generations*, however, was that the family names have to be carefully chosen so as to be plausible to the audience. They have to be traditional black South African names that the audience will recognize and accept as authentic. Hence the Moroka and Mthembu families were born.

### **Casting**

Once the task of choosing a name is completed, casting actors who embody what the characters are supposed to represent is the next crucial task. The Bells drew certain of the central characters from a body of actors that they previously worked with on *The Young and the Restless*, as well as some established soap actors from other soaps. Susan Flannery (Stephanie Forester) was the first actor cast. Flannery was previously part of the cast of another well known American soap, *The Days of our Lives*. John

McCook (Eric Forester) was another veteran soap actor. The Bells had worked with him previously on *The Young and the Restless*.

Aside from Flannery and McCook, they chose a cast with very little acting experience, which at the time was considered a risk (one which has subsequently paid off). One of the advantages of using relatively unknown actors, is that the public identifies them more strongly with the character they are playing because they know them only in the role of the character they play on the soap. The result is that, in the eyes of the viewer, the actor and the character he/she plays become synonymous with one another, which encourages the suspension of disbelief so crucial to the success of a soap. During the course of the interviews I conducted with the students who watch *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, one point which kept on asserting itself was that the informants tended to refer to the characters on *Generations* using the names of the actors because they recognised them from prior TV performances. With *The Bold and the Beautiful* however, they referred to the cast by the names of the characters they play, as they know them only in the roles they play on the soap. The implication was that because certain of the *Generations* cast members were familiar from other television genres, for example game shows, it was more difficult to suspend disbelief and accept them in roles of the characters they play on the show.

Ron Moss (Ridge Forester) had not had much acting experience before he was hired. According to Bradley Bell, he had the x-factor that they were looking for, and he personified the qualities they were looking for. Katherine Kelly Lang (Brooke Logan Forester) had guest starred on several prime time shows before making her appearance on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, but she was new to the world of daily soaps. She is the quintessential California girl, blonde, blue-eyed, tanned and gorgeous, exactly how the Bells pictured Brooke. Joanna Johnson was cast in the role of Ridge's love interest, Caroline Spencer. The actress embodied all the qualities needed to play the role of Caroline: innocence, strength and sweetness, the perfect foil for Ridge's other love interest, Brooke. With a daily soap, "every night is opening night" (*The Bold and the Beautiful: A tenth anniversary celebration*, 1996) according to Bill Bell, so using inexperienced actors is risky.

The producers of *Generations* did not have the luxury the Bell's had of being able to call on a vast body of experienced soap opera actors to people their production. Soap opera was in its infancy in South Africa in the mid 1990s, and even finding accomplished *television* actors was difficult. As a result, many of the actors on *Generations* were relatively unknown and inexperienced. Black actors in particular were difficult to come by, as historically blacks in South Africa had not been given much opportunity to study acting and participate in productions (of any kind). Some of the core cast of characters were drawn in

from other shows, so they were already known to the audience. Others were acting for the first time. Jimmy, a second year civil engineering student, expressed his opinion on the quality of the acting on *Generations* and *The Bold* as follows: "In *The Days* [*The Days of our Lives*] and *Bold* it's like a real thing. In *Generations* sometimes you can see that they are just acting".

Using actors or personalities from other types of shows or genres can impede the audience's suspension of disbelief, as they associate the actor playing the role with the show in which they appeared previously, as opposed to with the character they play on *Generations*. During the interviews some respondents struggled to remember the names of a specific character, but they knew the name of the actor. By virtue of the fact that *The Bold and the Beautiful* is American, and that the majority of the cast has remained the same since the show first aired, the respondents were generally not familiar with the names of the actors. In their minds the actors are synonymous with the characters they portray, as the viewers have only ever seen them in these roles.

### ***The Bold and the Beautiful*: defining plot characteristics**

#### **Romance**

Bradley Bell says that romance is what sets *The Bold and the Beautiful* apart from other shows. The soap tends not to have a 'super couple' or spies and adventure stories. Even

though the show has its fair share of excitement and intrigue, it is more of a human drama which revolves essentially around romance. The soap's focus on romance is borne out by the fact that there have been over a dozen weddings in its fourteen year run.

*Generations* has also used the standard American soap formula of romance as its central theme. The characters experience love, betrayal, deceit - the full spectrum of human emotions with which we are all familiar. As with most soap operas, relationships on *Generations* are in a constant state of disruption. No relationship lasts, however stable it may appear initially.

### **Glamour**

Another defining element in *The Bold and the Beautiful's* storyline is glamour. The Bells make full use of the style and glitz which is synonymous with the fashion industry when writing the scripts for the show. Forester Creations, the Forester family business, hosts an annual fashion show which has become an essential part of the show over the years. Viewers look forward to the event with excitement and anticipation. The show's writers and producers infuse the fashion shows with authenticity by keeping up with trends in the fashion industry.

Creating a fashion show is a long and involved process which begins with a production meeting during which

upcoming story developments are discussed in an effort to find a way of incorporating them into the fashion show. Certain key questions have to be asked when deciding on when and how to stage the fashion show:

- Does it enhance the story?
- Does it service the story?
- Will it move the story forward significantly?
- Will it pay off in terms of writing the script?

Once these questions have been answered, the planning of the fashion show begins. It is essentially a smaller production within the larger production of the show. Each year the production designers attempt to make the fashion show provocative and interesting. One show used impressionist paintings in the background, and another was shot on location in Italy.

The fashion show is often used to infuse excitement into the show. For example, Ridge's proposal to Taylor took place on the ramp at a Forrester Fashion show - Taylor was modelling a Forrester wedding gown when Ridge proposed. The scene had audiences riveted, as they weren't sure who would be modelling the gown, Brooke or Taylor, and which of the two women Ridge would decide to marry, as prior episodes built up audience anticipation leading to the culminating scene on the ramp. The very first Forester fashion show skillfully established the relationship between the central male Foresters as well as their distinguishing character

traits. The first fashion show saw Ridge being critical of his father and his designs, and Thorn coming to his father's defence, while Eric remained calm and collected through it all, in spite of the fact that his marriage was in trouble. This situation illustrates the relationship dynamics between these three central male characters. Their temperaments are best summed up as follows:

**Eric Forester: confident, even tempered, good father**

**Ridge Forester: rebellious and ambitious**

**Thorne Forester: loyal, desperately wants Eric's approval**

Staging a fashion show is a daunting task which involves dozens of additional performers and technicians and location difficulties. Often real life celebrities are incorporated into a story line around a fashion show. According to the show's producer / director, John Zach, they try to incorporate celebrities on the soap so that they become an organic part of the series. The show's writers are able to intermesh reality with the fictitious story because it is believable that the Foresters, who are in the fashion industry, would know people in film and television. At other times, *The Bold and the Beautiful* casts well known performers in short term roles on the show.

*Generations* is set in the less overtly glamorous world of advertising. Even though the Morokas are wealthy, there is less appearance of glamour in their lifestyle than in that



of the wealthy Forester family on *The Bold and the Beautiful*. This is partially due to budget constraints. The producers of *Generations* do not have the large budgets that their American counterparts do, which is responsible, in part, for the less opulent sets. A large percentage of the respondents interviewed said that they felt that *Generations* (sets, wardrobe etc.) looked 'cheap' when compared with *The Bold and the Beautiful*. It is important to note however, that this did not seem to influence the level of enjoyment and emotional involvement with the characters on *Generations*.

### **Tackling social issues**

Over the years *The Bold and the Beautiful* has tackled a number of significant subjects which have heightened the public's awareness, such as

- Acquaintance rape
- Homelessness
- Alcoholism
- Sexual abuse
- Teenage pregnancy

Often a social issue is inspired by an article one of the show's writers may have seen . In 1987 for example, there were reports in the newspapers of acquaintance rape. This led to a story line in which Caroline Spencer was raped by a man she met in a bar. She was attracted to the handsome

man, who seemed charming and kind. Caroline was a virginal character, innocent and decent. The producers felt the issue of date rape was important and they wanted to get the message out that if a woman says 'no!', it means 'no!' and that women are not responsible for the crime of rape - men have be accountable for their actions.

Another storyline inspired by news coverage, was Stephanie Forester's homelessness in the soap's fifth season. A former writer on the show was inspired by an article in the L.A. Times about the homeless women living on the streets. Stephanie was the character selected to experience life on the streets. Stephanie was 'stricken' with amnesia resulting from an accident, and ended up wandering the streets of Los Angeles. *The Bold and the Beautiful* explored, through Stephanie's eyes, the horror of being homeless, as well as the compassion people living on the streets have for one another. Stephanie was befriended by a woman called Ruth, who through unfortunate circumstances has ended up penniless, homeless and isolated from her family. Once Stephanie is reunited with her family, she makes arrangements for Ruth to get in touch with her family, and the two remain firm friends, with Ruth making periodic appearances on the show.

Macy Alexander took to drinking heavily after the break-up of her marriage to Thorne Forester. The writers showed Macy's deterioration as a result of her habit and

illustrated to the audience how to handle an alcoholic and what channels are available for those in need of help.

*The Bold and the Beautiful* is the first American daytime soap to include a mentally disabled character in its cast, as well as the first to cast a mentally disabled actor in the role. Eighteen year old Keith Jones joined the show in 1993 as Kevin Anderson, an employee at the Bikini Bar. Keith was discovered through a 'best buddies' programme, which allows college students and young people with mild mental disabilities to become friends. Lee Philip Bell says the following of the show's handling of sensitive social issues: "we feel you can deal with any issue if you approach it with great respect and accuracy - you must be honest" (*The Bold and the Beautiful: A tenth anniversary celebration*, 1996).

The inclusion of social issues in the soap opera format is a feature which has its roots in British soaps. One of the characteristics of British soaps is the way in which they undertake a realist function in their representation of British society. This is true particularly since the 1980s. One of the reasons for the inclusion of social issues was to attract a wider audience - young people, men and those concerned with political and social issues (Geraghty, 1995: 66). American soap opera producers have been slower to embrace the notion of using their productions as a platform for voicing relevant social problems, preferring to keep their focus on the 'glamour and glitz' escapist aspect of

the soap formula. This has changed in recent years, as producers have begun to realise that they can firstly attract larger audiences by tackling relevant social issues, and secondly perform a social function, by showing viewers (particularly younger ones), that their problems are not unique. Making characters go through common social difficulties also has the effect of creating greater identification between character and viewer. The interviews conducted for this thesis revealed that often interviewees stated their main reason for choosing specific characters as their favourites was that they identified with what the characters were experiencing. Themba, a male student, gave the following motivation for liking the character of Brooke on *The Bold and the Beautiful*: "I admire her character. If you want something you must do as you think and she is able to face the consequences of what she did. She trusts herself...". Conversely, reasons for disliking specific characters was equally motivated by the way in which they handle specific issues.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in its early years *Generations* concentrated on racial issues which were particularly relevant in the country at the time, such as inter-racial relationships, interaction between white Afrikaans speaking South Africans and black South Africans. In addition, it has always included universal societal ills such as drug abuse (Karabo's drug addiction), living with AIDS / HIV (Sarah Lee's adoption of an HIV positive child), rape, emotional abuse, amongst others.

Elsje Stark made it clear however that although the show's writers tackle social issues where possible in an effort to educate viewers, this is not the focal point of the show - entertainment is the primary aim.

In terms of script writing, there are distinctions between *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* in the processes followed. Unlike *The Bold*, which makes use of a team of writers who work together on storylines, supervised by a head writer, the six script writers on *Generations* work independently. Each episode is drafted by one writer. Elsje Starck, in addition to being one of the show's producers, is also the script editor. Each script is edited by her before being finalised. She says that she prefers to call the shows writers 'dialogue' writers as opposed to script writers, as they are given an outline of an episode (drawn up by one of the staff in the script writing department) into which they have to fill the dialogue of the characters. The writers do not collaborate with one another, they work independently.

### **Fusing fiction and reality**

According to *The Bold and the Beautiful*'s producer / director, John Zach, the show's writers frequently incorporate celebrities into the story so that they become an organic part of the lives of the characters, rather than bringing them on just for the sake of stunning the audience. The inclusion of celebrities enables the writers

to intermesh reality with their fictitious story because it is believable that the Foresters and Spectras, who are in the fashion industry, would know people in film and television. For example, in one episode, Lauren Fenmore arranges a special performance for Eric Forester by Dion Warwick, who appears on the show as a close personal friend of Lauren's. At other times, instead of having celebrities appear as themselves, they are cast as performers. Phyllis Diller for example had a short term role on the show, as did Carol Channing.

*Generations* has employed similar devices, by including well known celebrities as actors. Most notably, the inclusion of one of South Africa's best known female singers, the lead singer of Boom Shaka, Lebo Matose, not as herself, but as a friend of Archie Moroka's illegitimate daughter, Kentsane. The inclusion of well-known celebrities as actors on *Generations* is a clever device to attract viewers.

### **Set Design**

In their book entitled *Life on Daytime Television: Tuning in American Serial Drama* (1983), Mary Cassata and Thomas Skill devote a chapter to soap opera settings and fashions. They point out that the soap opera form has survived for as long as it has because of its ability to adapt to its social environment. "Soap opera conventions are not static. They are stable enough to sustain an audience, yet flexible

enough to accommodate change" (Cassata and Skill, 1983: 125).

As mentioned previously in this chapter, a common perception about soaps is that the sets are tacky and two-dimensional. Cassata and Skill (1983) refer to Horace Newcomb's book, *Television: The Most Popular Art* (1974), in which Newcomb asserts that "soap operas rely on representational rather than presentational set design. They are, instead, marked by symbols, most of which reflect stereotypes, recognisable to all audience members" (Cassata and Skill, 1983: 126). For example, a doctor's office need only be minimally represented in order for the viewer to identify it. Newcomb asserts that the knowledge viewers share about what goes on in a doctor's office - what it looks like - gives them a role in creating the soap opera. Viewers help to create it by providing it with a seemingly natural link to the real world. "This link, which is manifest not in the soap opera but in ourselves, makes the drama real to us in a more personal manner than that afforded by costlier sets and more expensive scenic design" (Cassata and Skill, 1983: 126). As Cassata and Skill point out, Newcomb clearly believes that it is inappropriate to discuss the soap opera 'look' out of context of character and dialogue. Newcomb maintains the following:

the most important aspect of the daytime soap opera is the individual face, in all its variety and with its vast capacity to express emotion.

Soap opera sets may appear flimsy under scrutiny, but characters and their psyches are always substantive. And, of course, each episode is resplendent with dialogue, some of which is cliched, but a great deal of which reflects a concern with daily, unspectacular, yet infinitely interesting events and activities. Words become the mainstay of the form, not sets or clothing...Soap operas, Newcomb seems to suggest, can easily afford to be primarily representational in certain areas, because in certain other areas they are so strongly and effectively presentational. (Cassata and Skill, 1983: 126)

Despite the fact that Newcomb's research was conducted in the 1970s, it is still relevant today. Even though in some instances the soap opera form has become more sophisticated, essentially the formula has remained the same in terms of production scale. When one watches a soap opera year in and year out, five days a week, the homes and offices where the imaginary lives of the characters unfold can become as familiar as the sights one sees in one's own neighbourhood. What long-time *Bold and Beautiful* viewer does not remember Ridge helping Brooke deliver her baby in the Forrester cabin in Big Bear, or the Forrester swimming pool, where so much romance has played itself out? The interviews conducted for this thesis would indicate that there are not many, which bears out Newcomb's observations.



According to the producers of *The Bold and the Beautiful*, a successfully designed set enhances the drama but does not distract from the primary focus - the carefully constructed characters and their complex and emotionally charged relationships.

Most of the show's interiors reflect Los Angeles's open, sunny feeling, with the creation of light and shadow being a focus in the set design. The creative production team generally choose subtle colors in their interiors in order to enhance fashions worn by the characters, which are central to the show's theme. The 'drama' of the settings comes from the luxurious furnishings and architecture.

There is nothing small about the sets for *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The Forester living room for example, is 18 feet high, and as big as the studio will accommodate. The sets in some instances have to be moveable because they have to be rolled out of the studio on weekends, when the network uses the space for game shows.

Lighting is an essential part of the set creation. Often the production crew are faced with the challenge of simulating an outdoor scene indoors. The infamous Forester pool for example, is built indoors, but has to appear to the viewer as being outside. Believability is a key element in the creation of all the show's sets. The offices of Forrester Creations for example are modelled on offices in

New York's fashion district. Cy Tomashoff drew particularly on the Ralph Lauren showrooms on New York's Madison Avenue.

Sometimes the set designers get their inspiration from sources closer to home. Brooke's house for example is modelled on Bradley Bell's house. The exterior views of the house are taken from Bradley Bell's home, which makes shooting outdoor scenes much easier, as they can use his house.

The set designers try to incorporate elements of the characters personalities in their homes and offices. Sally Spectra's apartment for example is much more cluttered and kitsch than the Forester mansion. It helps give a sense that it is a home that Sally could have had a hand in decorating. As Newcomb points out, "the soap opera world is a world of interiors" (Cassata and Skill: 1983: 127). Viewers have to be able to identify the locations easily, and they have to become familiar with them, which is why so much attention is paid to detail on the sets which make up the fictional world of *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

As mentioned previously, the producers of *Generations* do not have the same budgets as their American counterparts, and they have to work within these constraints. The *Generations* sets are housed in the SABC's Henley studios. The bulk of the sets are in one large studio. Some of the sets, however, are housed in a separate studio. These are known as 'swing sets'. In other words, they are not

permanent sets. The studio with the swing sets gets used by other productions, so *Generations* only has access to it on certain days of the week. On the days that the show shoots in this studio, the sets are brought in and dismantled and removed once shooting is complete.

As the sets on *Generations* are not as elaborate or expensive as the sets on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, it is not surprising that the *Generations* sets give the impression of being inexpensive. According to Rothiwa, a first year B.Com student, the reason *Generations* appears to be a less sophisticated production than *The Bold* is because "those guys [the Americans] have been doing it for a long time and *Generations* is quite new". The homes of the various characters do not reflect their individual personalities in the same way that the sets on *The Bold* do. The home of the Morokas is slightly more lavishly furnished than the other domestic sets, but the distinction is not that marked. Even though the interviewees picked up on this, again it must be asserted that in the majority of cases it did not affect their enjoyment of the show. As soaps are primarily about dialogue, the sets are not as significant as they are in other television genres. If one were to compare *Generations* with American *prime time*<sup>2</sup> soaps such as *Dynasty* or *Dallas*, the comparison would be

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<sup>2</sup> Prime time soaps are characterized (amongst other things) by the fact they are aired once a week in what is considered a prime viewing slot. They are more expensive to produce than daytime soaps, each episode is generally forty five minutes long as opposed to the 26 minutes of an average daytime soap.

laughable. As mentioned previously however, *Generations* is a hybrid in that it is a daytime soap formula in a prime time slot. Even though *Generations* is produced by an independent production company, it is commissioned by the SABC and makes use of the SABC's staff and facilities.

Some of the *Generations* technical crew have travelled abroad to learn techniques from other soap opera productions. According to Maynaard Kraak, the technical expertise and equipment (such as lighting) are as good as those used on productions like *The Bold and the Beautiful*. This is not always evident to the viewers, as indicated in the interviews.

### **Clothing**

The importance of clothing in creating realism and establishing relationships between viewers and characters on a soap opera production is not to be underestimated. Because *The Bold and the Beautiful* is so connected to the fashion industry, there is great care given to the 'look' of the characters, that one will not find on other soaps. The characters are generally dressed in designer clothes, as well as specially designed ones. It is also important that the characters are dressed in what the viewer recognises as 'high fashion' - they have to keep up with current fashions. What follows is a breakdown of the fashion styles (and names of designers used to dress them)

of several of the characters on *The Bold and the Beautiful* which illustrates the meticulous attention to detail in dressing them:

**Eric Forester:** Eric is sophisticated and this is reflected in his wardrobe, which includes creations by designers like Armani and Donna Karan

**Stephanie Forester:** Her clothes are specially designed for her, using strong, vivid colors.

**Ridge Forester:** He is trendy, and his outfits go from very casual to smart. He is usually clad in Armani, Hugo Boss and Donna Karan.

**Brooke Logan Forester:** Brooke has a beautiful body, and her clothes are often revealing, even at the office, because she can carry it off and it suits her character.

**Sally Spectra:** Her clothes reflect her personality. Her clothes are bright and over-accessorized with large earrings and sparkles and spangles.

**Lauren Fenmore.** Lauren is in the fashion industry, so she is very fashion conscious. Her clothes reflect her style and sophistication. She is often clad in Betsy Johnson, Moschino and Donna Karan.

**James Warwick:** His clothes reflect his professionalism. Because of his position as a prominent and highly respected psychiatrist, his clothes have to be understated and sophisticated. Yuji Yamamoto's designs are often used on James.

Once again, when examining the clothing on *Generations* compared with *The Bold*, budget becomes an issue. Unlike the actors on *The Bold* who are dressed by top international designers, with great attention to the personality and career of the character, the cast of *Generations* is not as meticulously or lavishly attired. The clothes are acquired either from retail outlets, or from local designers. The choice depends largely on the physiques of the actors. In the case of characters like Queen and Ntsiki, who are both large women, clothes cannot be readily acquired and have to be specially made up. This is an important factor in the dressing of the characters. There are obvious distinctions between what the characters wear based on their professions. Kentsane for example, is a university student, so her wardrobe is generally more casual than Nstiki, who is an advertising executive. So, in spite of the budgetary constraints, there has been a concerted effort made to distinguish the wardrobe of the characters as much as possible.

The production process behind soaps is an essential link in conceptualising the soap audience. Also, given that the consumption of a South African and an American soap opera are being compared in this thesis, the production process could not be ignored.

## Chapter 7

### Characteristics and consumption of soap opera

*"In living memory of Roland Barthes, who understood that a critic also needs to be a fan" (Masterman: 1984).*

For years, 'soap' "was a term of derision, an expression which implied an over-dramatic, under-rehearsed presentation of trivial dramas blown up out of all proportion to their importance" (Geraghty, 1991: 1). Yet in spite of the fact that soaps are held in such low regard, there are millions of soap opera devotees the world over.

In this chapter, I will attempt to explore the nature of soap operas and how they work, as well as examine the term 'soap opera' and how it has been (and still is being) used. The chapter will also include an investigation of the concept of 'pleasure' in its relation to the viewing of soap opera in a global context. More specifically, it will analyse the way the students I interviewed consume soap opera, using existing literature as a point of comparison and frame of reference.

#### **Soap viewing: tinged with shame?**

Despite the immense popularity of soap operas the world over, as Richard Kilborn points out, " for some viewers an innocent and pleasurable activity, in which there is a high degree of emotional involvement, has become tinged with distinctly guilty feelings" (Kilborn, 1992: 10). Dorothy Hobson, in a study she conducted amongst a group of housewives in England, who watch the British soap opera, *Crossroads*, discovered a tendency amongst

some of the women "to feel guilty and apologetic that they watch the programme" (Hobson, 1982: 110).

One of the most intriguing things, which came out of the interviews I conducted, was that none of the students expressed any shame or embarrassment about the fact that they watch *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*. I had expected to encounter a little reluctance on the part of the male students in particular, to talking about their soap viewing habits, but on the contrary, I encountered no resistance whatsoever. The reason I expected to meet with resistance was that the majority of research I examined during the course of doing of my thesis indicated a consistent pattern amongst soap viewers to apologise or make excuses for their viewing habits.

### **The origins of soap opera**

By the early 1930s, radio broadcasting was a thriving entertainment industry dependent upon delivering substantial audiences on a regular basis to the programs' sponsors. Networks were thus under ongoing pressure to produce forms of entertainment, which would draw listeners. (Hagedorn, 1995: 35). The origins of soap opera go back to these early days of radio broadcasting in America (1930s-1940s), "where detergent manufacturers and makers of other household products helped promote a form of daytime programming which would build a large and loyal audience of housewife consumers" (Kilborn, 1992: 24). What made (and still makes) the soap opera form so profitable "is its ability to attract and hold what is, in advertising terms, a quality audience - women between the ages of eighteen and fifty four. This group, particularly that portion of it under thirty-five, makes most of the American family's 'soft'-goods purchases (consumable items... such as food, clothes, and, of course, cleaning products)" (Allen, 1987: 142). This is true not only in



the American context but in South Africa as well.

The trend in the production of South African television soaps today, is to secure sponsorships from major companies to offset heavy production costs. *Generations* acquired sponsorship from Vodacom, one of the main cellular telephone network providers in the country. The first South African soap to attract major advertising sponsorship, was M-Net's *Egoli*, which today boasts a range of high profile sponsorships.

Given the fact that the target audience of the first radio soaps (in America) was women, the producers chose a format based on forms of fictional entertainment, which had proved popular with female audiences in the past. The 'domestic novel', a form dating back to the middle of the eighteenth century, was a strong influence in the early soaps. These novels featured female characters prominently, and focused on issues centred on the home and family. Many of these novels were written by women (see Kilborn, 1992). Thus, the first soap operas were a mixture of romance, family conflict, and fevered emotions.

The first radio soaps in America became immensely popular. In fact, their popularity far exceeded the expectations of their producers. Most advertising revenue from these soaps came from companies who sold household products, and the shows quickly became associated with these products. Thus, "the term soap opera was developed, to describe the melodramatic plotlines sold by detergent companies" (Matelski, 1988: 1).

With the introduction of television, the popularity of radio soaps began to wane, and by the mid-1950s, the era of the radio soap in America was practically over, and television soaps were born. In South Africa however, television had not yet made its appearance, and the South African radio soaps continued to be

popular well into the seventies. Many of the American script writers who had worked on radio soaps, made the transition into television, which meant that many of the early television soaps were similar to their radio predecessors (see Kilborn, 1992). Marilyn Matelski conducted a comparative study between radio soap operas in the 1940s and television soap operas in the 1980s. Matelski notes that the change in technology affected production at all levels. Firstly, the TV soaps were thirty minutes long, as opposed to the fifteen-minute radio soaps.

As television allowed the viewers to see the characters, "plotlines became more slowly paced to capitalise on all the advantages of the new visual medium" (Matelski, 1988: 7). Matelski also notes that the visual medium allowed for a greater variety of settings, because "writers were not forced to limit themselves to the experiential world of radio listeners" (Matelski, 1988: 8). From the point of view of content, Matelski concluded that there was a greater measure of reality in the TV soaps of the '80s, than in the radio soaps of the '40s. The trends in today's soaps, will be discussed later in the Chapter.

#### **Soap opera: general characteristics**

Dorothy Hobson gives the following as very basic definition of soap opera: "a program that is a continuous drama serial which should be transmitted daily" (Hobson, 1994: 51). There is somewhat more to soap opera than is encompassed in Hobson's definition however. Some of the defining features of soap opera which distinguish it from other forms of television serials are defined by Mary Ellen Brown (Brown, 1994: 48-49) as follows: (I have incorporated examples from *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*)

1. The centrality of female characters (Stephanie Forester, Dr. Taylor Hayes, Macy Alexander, Brooke Logan Forester, Sally Spectra, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Karabo Moroka, Ntsiki Moretsele, Thembi Khumalo, Kgomotso Mudau, *Generations*).
2. The characterisation of female characters as powerful, often in the world outside the home. Lauren Fenmore, Sally Spectra, Brooke Logan, Dr. Taylor Hayes, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Ntsiki Lukhele, Kgomotso Mudau, Karabo Moroka, *Generations*.
3. Multiple characters and plots as well as multiple points of view (Episodes of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* are typically made up of several story lines)
4. The portrayal of many of the male characters as 'sensitive' men. Eric, Ridge and Thorne Forester, James Warwick, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Glen Majozi, *Generations*.
5. Emphasis on problem solving, and intimate conversation in which dialogue carries the weight of the plot.
6. Plots that hinge on relationships between people, particularly family and romantic relationships.
7. The home, or some other place that functions as a home (often a hospital), as the setting for the show.
8. Concerns of non-dominant groups being taken seriously.
9. Use of time that parallels actual time and implies that the action continues to take place whether we watch it or not.
10. Serial form that resists narrative closure.
11. Abrupt segmentation between parts without cause-and-effect relationships between segments.

The following is a summary of the events of one episode of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. I am including it in an effort to illustrate how Brown's list of soap opera characteristics works in practice:

- Eric and Brooke both have romance on their minds, inspired by the beauty of Lake Como.
- Ridge asks Stephanie to consider Eric's attempts to make up with her, but Stephanie wants to talk about Taylor instead.
- Dr. Santana is checking out Taylor, who gets a good report - but Taylor is only waiting for a chance to call Ridge.
- Ridge tells Stephanie that it is over with Taylor since she is with Thorne, so Stephanie should get used to the idea of Brooke in his life.
- Sally and Lauren arrive at the hotel and, by threatening to make a scene, manage to get a room at the *Villa D'Este*.
- Taylor confides in Dr. Santana that she thinks Ridge is hesitating since he has not proposed to Brooke - and she's sure she is the reason.
- Brooke arrives in Ridge's room to tell him and Stephanie that Eric wants them dressed immediately.
- At a press conference, Ridge is stunned to learn that Eric has allied them with Italian designer Rocco Barocco - and the press are impressed as well.
- Eric fields questions from the press and assures them that this show is not an act of desperation.
- Lauren tells Sally that she doesn't share her glee in seeing the Foresters destroyed, and she says she wants Eric to come out in one piece.
- Stephanie and Eric wish each other luck.
- Brooke and Ridge talk about how everything is coming

together - and she asks Ridge to promise, if romance is on the cards, that it will be forever.

- Ridge assures Brooke that it will be forever, thanks her for her loyalty.
- Taylor calls Thorne on the cell phone and says she has to speak to Ridge.
- Thorne discourages Taylor from talking to Ridge, saying Ridge is with Brooke.
- When Ridge approaches, Taylor hears his voice over the phone and asks Thorne to put Ridge on, but Thorne hangs up.

### **Soap Operas: never-ending stories**

Richard Kilborn points out that "[b]ecause soaps are so immensely popular, they have become the subject of many studies both to explain the roots of this popularity and to reflect upon the cultural significance of such a phenomenon" (Kilborn:1992:22). The one characteristic people are most likely to associate with soap operas is their lack of closure. It is this openness, which separates soaps from other forms of television serials. Soaps are made up of unfolding narratives where individual storylines are carried over from one episode to the next, is the feature which most clearly separates them from other forms of television drama. They continually project viewers and the lives of the fictional characters within the soaps into the future (Kilborn, 1992).

Even though individual stories within the fabric of the soap opera narrative may draw to a close, the story as a whole continues indefinitely, or until the soap is terminated due to, for example, a decline in viewership. It is not uncommon for soaps to run for a period of over twenty years and longer, as is the case with American soaps such as *The Days of our Lives* and

*All My Children*, both of which are still running after more than two decades of being on the air. In the case of *The Bold and the Beautiful* it has been broadcast for over twelve years in the USA and almost as long in South Africa.

The term 'genre' is according to Jane Feuer, simply the French word for type or kind. When it is used in literary, film, or television studies, however,

it takes on a broader set of implications. The very use of the term implies that works of literature, film and television programs can be categorised; they are not unique. Thus genre theory deals with the ways in which a work may be considered to belong to a class of related works (Feuer, 1993: 138).

Feuer examines how genre studies have been adapted from the study of literature to film and television. She points out that literary genre classifications are too broad to be applied directly to film and television, which "are culturally specific and temporally limited" (Feuer, 1993: 139). What is important to note, is that "some genres are defined by culture, while others are defined by critics...For example, although Homer did not refer to his own work as an 'epic' poem, both industry and critics employ the categories of 'Western' and 'sitcom'" (Feuer, 1993: 140). Television studies is too new a field to have already differentiated substantially between historical and theoretical genres, however there is currently an attempt to redefine some of the accepted categories such as soap opera.

A new conceptualisation of the genre is emerging, in which the continuing serial format is not necessarily equated with the descriptive term 'soap opera', which was originally a derisive

term used to condemn other forms of drama as being overly melodramatic. The term 'soap opera' has been refined "in a confrontation between such historical examples as the afternoon serial drama, prime-time serials, and British soap operas, [which are better classified] as 'social realism' than melodrama" (Feuer, 1993).

Feuer distinguishes three different approaches to genre in relation to film and television. The first is the 'aesthetic approach', which "includes all attempts to define genre in terms of a system of conventions that permits artistic expression, especially involving individual authorship" (Feuer, 1993: 145). The second classification is the 'ritual approach' which "sees genre as an exchange between industry and audience, an exchange through which a culture speaks to itself" (Feuer, 1993: 145). The last category is the 'ideological approach' which sees genre as an instrument of control. At the industrial level, genres assure the advertisers of an audience for their messages. At the textual level, genres are ideological insofar as they serve to reproduce the dominant ideology of the capitalist system. The genre positions the interpretative community in such a way as to 'naturalise' the dominant ideologies articulated in the text (Feuer:1993:145). A criticism which has long been levelled at American soap operas, is that they entrench western capitalist values in their viewers. Theorists have been particularly critical of American soaps which are screened in non-western countries, for the fact that they supposedly encourage consumerism and instil western belief systems.

According to Fiske, genre is "a cultural practice that attempts to structure some order into the wide range of texts and meanings that circulate in our culture for the convenience of both producers and audiences" (Fiske, 1994: 109). Television

programmes seem to fit clearly into generic categories - soap operas, sitcoms, quiz shows, game shows etc (Fiske, 1994). The classification of soap opera into a specific genre can be problematic, as traditionally, 'genre' implies a static classification based on features existing in the text itself. According to Robert Allen, genre needs to be reframed, as it describes a dynamic relationship between two texts and interpretative communities, more than a group of texts or textual features (Allen, 1994: 45).

In terms of Allen's reframing of genre, the term 'soap opera' describes not a static group of texts, but much more problematically describes several different sets of discursive relationships between a variety of perceived textual features and at least three different types of interpretative communities, namely: the industrial, critical, and viewer communities. In other words, soap opera is appropriated within at least three different discursive systems (Allen, 1994: 45). Further complicating matters, is the consideration that:

[W]hatever it is to whom, the soap opera is a transnational and transcultural phenomenon, so that for each of these three types of interpretative communities and corresponding interpretative systems there are distinctive instances from each national culture...[E]ach country's experience with the range of texts to which the term "soap opera" has been applied is different (Allen, 1994: 45).

Allen attributes the critical interest in soap operas in the late 1970s and 1980s to the overwhelming success of the American serial drama, *Dallas* (which detailed the lives of a Texan oil family), that took America and the rest of the TV-watching world by storm. *Dallas* was framed within the critical discourse as



'soap opera' (see Allen, 1994). American soap operas have global appeal - the world is fascinated with the American consumer culture which *Dallas* epitomised, as is evidenced by the fact that in 1980, 400 million people around the world tuned in to *Dallas* to watch the episode in which J.R. Ewing was shot. "Back then it was a high-water mark for U.S. television entertainment on global screens, and the tide has yet to go out. Today viewers from Bahrain to Borneo are still hooked on an increasing flow of comedies, dramas and soap operas exported from America" (*Time Magazine*: September 25: 1995).

Daniel Miller explored the idea of soaps "as a media form linked with the general spread of mass consumption" (Miller, 1995: 213). Miller challenges the common association of soap operas with advertising, which is believed by those who condemn soap operas, to have harmful effects on viewers, such as cultural homogenisation, a new superficiality/vulgarity, and commodification (see Miller, 1995: 213). Miller challenges this critique, subjecting it to an ethnographic case study of the actual consumption of the American soap opera, *The Young and the Restless*, in Trinidad.

Miller concedes that even though there may be a significant link between the spread of soap opera and the spread of commoditisation, this link "may be quite different from the simple assertion that one is merely the instrument for promoting the other, which would fail to account for the many varieties of soap opera (for example in Britain) where the setting is generally one of relative poverty" (Miller, 1995: 231). Miller's work deconstructs the traditional condemnations of soap operas as vehicles for encouraging consumerism, (which often go unchallenged), while at the same time, exploring the cross-cultural appeal of soap operas.

It has been argued that both the lifestyle and products which are associated with soap operas, result in the breakdown of local cultural practices and diverse traditions. The essence of these critiques of soap operas, is that the goods and lifestyle analogous with American soaps, emanates from a core culture often seen as synonymous with Americanisation. Exposure to these soaps it is asserted, results in the replacement of indigenous culture with a desire to emulate a single model of affluent life (see Miller, 1995).

### **Soap opera: the plot thickens**

"The essence of soap opera plots is that they are ever-changing" (Matelski, 1988: 11). The soap opera plot is characterised by continual disruption and threat. It is a certainty for example, that soap characters will not be happy forever - if there is a marriage, it *will* end. "All soap opera marriages have within them the seeds of their own destruction" (Fiske, 1994: 181). On *The Bold and the Beautiful* for example, Ridge Forester and Brooke Logan were married, after Ridge's wife, Dr. Taylor Hayes, died in a plane crash. Her body was never recovered however. The well-informed soap viewer knew, that this meant she was not really dead, and would return to destroy Ridge and Brooke's marriage. Taylor Hayes did not die in the crash, she was rescued by the Prince of Morocco, and eventually, after much trauma, returned home. Ridge however decided to stay with Brooke, primarily because they have a daughter, Bridget. *But*, Bridget's paternity was uncertain, as Brooke was sleeping with Ridge and his father, Eric (to whom she was then married) when she fell pregnant with Bridget. Sheila, had set her sights on Eric, so she tampered with the results of the paternity test to ensure that Ridge would be declared the child's father and not Eric (Sheila is a nurse). Recently the whole issue of Bridget's paternity came to the fore

(courtesy of Sheila), and it came out that Bridget was in fact *Eric's* daughter, and *not* Ridge's. This on the eve of Brooke and Ridge's wedding (the first marriage was annulled, as Taylor was still alive). As a result of the shock, Brooke left town on Ridge's mother, Stephanie's instructions, but has subsequently lost her memory from the shock of the news that Ridge is not Bridget's father. She is now in Barbados, stealing food from restaurants and scavenging on the beach. I have recounted this story for two reasons. Firstly, to illustrate the disruption characteristic of the soap plot, and also to illustrate the convoluted nature of the ongoing storyline.

Another key feature of soaps is the constant deferment of a conclusion. Fiske talks about the "infinitely extended middle" (Fiske, 1994: 182) which characterises soaps. According to Fiske, deferment and process are enacted in dialogue and facial expression. The camera will linger on a character's face , so that the viewer can see the character's feelings and reactions. Close-ups are an important feature, as they increase the emotional intensity of the scene, and enhance the viewer's ability to really experience what the character is feeling. As Bernard Timberg points out,

when we compare soaps to other types of daytime programming, we are struck by their use of close-ups and extreme close-ups. This shooting style is consistent with the kind of world soap opera portrays. As a narrative ritual that centres on intense, concentrated forms of emotion, soap opera requires an intense, intimate camera style (Timberg, 1987: 166).

According to Joy V. Fuqua "the television soap opera form, generically speaking, has long accommodated specific social issues such as incest, alcoholism, abortion, rape, homosexuality, and most recently, AIDS" (Fuqua, 1995: 200). These issues are

traditionally introduced into the soap opera story line by a marginal character, who enters the soap opera community. If the introduction of the new peripheral character(s) becomes too problematic, these characters can be re-directed or written out of the soap opera narrative. "By tying problematic social issues to marginal characters, soaps, in comparison to other television narratives, are able to 'openly' embrace daring issues" (Fuqua, 1995: 200).

Fuqua points out that a character's peripheral nature should be understood as more than just a narrative manifestation; marginal positionality may be representative of structural and institutional concerns for positive audience response:

Hence, although the social issue story-lines of soap operas have historically spoken from a didactic and oftentimes classically liberal humanist position, the teaching of 'tolerance' of race, class, and recently sexuality, has always been tempered by the constant, material necessity to sell advertisers' products to the target audience (Fuqua, 1995: 201).

Although the conventional soap opera narrative uses these marginal characters to introduce traditionally taboo social issues, these characters are occasionally made permanent members of the soap opera community. The over-riding concern however, remains a commercial one. It is as a result of this concern with ratings and keeping advertisers happy, that the marginal character's permanent inclusion into the soap opera community, is conditional. Permanent status can only be awarded, if the writers can successfully disembody the problematic issue from the character (see Fuqua, 1995).

*The Bold and the Beautiful's* Macy Forester, (a permanent member of the cast of *The Bold and the Beautiful*), Thorne Forester's wife, recently had 'a problem' with alcohol - the result of her break-up with Thorne. Her 'problem' developed into alcoholism. She has subsequently been rehabilitated, and is now re-married to Thorne. Fuqua's assessment that only *marginal* characters are used to introduce contentious social issues into soaps, is therefore not always borne out.

According to Ronald Berman, one of the most distinguishing features of soaps is that they are literally all talk. There is very little action in proportion to production time. In addition, soap dialogues are both expressive and subjective (Berman, 1987: 70). Characters are constantly expressing their feelings and anxieties, often in a monologue. Berman goes on to point out that soap opera dialogue bears a peculiar resemblance to the talk of a patient to an analyst. The most common moment in a soap conversation involves two people, one with personal emotional torment that must be voiced, and the other "with no business but to listen" (Berman, 1987: 70).

Viewers become embroiled in the lives of the characters on their favourite soap, because they are privy to the innermost thoughts of the characters. Viewers derive a great deal of pleasure from playing through their minds what developments are likely, given their knowledge of past episodes (see: Kilborn, 1992).

### **Characters**

Soaps are peopled by a number of different characters, each intertwined in a multiplicity of convoluted plots. Characters are killed off, and return a few months later with new names -

usually as long lost relatives. In *The Bold and the Beautiful* for example, the character of Caroline Spencer died of cancer (i.e. she was written out of the soap). The same actress returned some months later however, as Caroline's long-lost twin sister, Caryn, who had been separated from her family at birth. It is difficult to keep track of who is dead or alive. Over the short term, this does not really matter. Over the long term however, "the soap is basically incomprehensible. If a show has had a run of a few years its plot will look like a particularly ingeniously confused Turkish carpet" (Berman, 1987).

The following is a list of primary and secondary character types which occur in most daytime soaps. Mary Cassata et al compiled these character types through the "utilisation of psychographics and Interpersonal Behaviour Skills" (Cassata et al.: 1983: 12). I have indicated which characters from *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* fit into each character type, in an effort to illustrate how the categories operate in practice.

#### ***Primary Types (main characters)***

1. *Chic Suburbanite*: well-educated, ambitious, upper-middle class man or woman, usually divorced or single, 20-34 years of age. Concerned with social mobility. Usually carefree, selfishly intent on enjoying life. (Clarke Garrison, Jasmine Malone, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Queen Mthembu, *Generations*).
2. *The Subtle Single*: similar to the "Chic Suburbanite", though women significantly out number men in this category. Achievement orientated; strong family bonds; seek love and family bonds for fulfillment (Taylor Hayes, James Warwick, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Kgomotso Mudau,

*Generations*).

3. *Traditional Family Person*: usually married, homemaker or labourer between the age of 20 and 34, primarily centered on the family (Maggie Forester, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Karabo Moroka, *Generations*).
4. *Successful Professional*: career-focused, usually single or divorced. Women in this category are usually portrayed as being overly ambitious and aggressive (Sally Spectra, *The Bold and the Beautiful* and Ntsiki Lukhele, *Generations*).
5. *Elegant Socialite*: married, usually middle aged professional or homemaker, perceived as being a snob (Stephanie Forester, *The Bold and the Beautiful*).

***Secondary Types (occur less often, but still important to plot development)***

1. *Self-made Business Person*
2. *Contented Youth*
3. *Troubled Teen*
4. *Dissatisfied Homemaker*
5. *Frustrated Labourer*
6. *Happy Homemaker*
7. *Retiring Homebody*

According to Kilborn, individual viewers derive great pleasure from "playing through in their minds what developments are likely, given all that has gone before...Viewers may well become absorbed in these continuing dramas, but this does not mean to say that this is not a critical involvement" (Kilborn, 1992: 14). The nature of audience involvement in, and enjoyment of soaps, will be explored in the discussion of **pleasure**, which follows.

## In pursuit of pleasure

"A large part of the enjoyment which is derived from watching soap operas lies in talking about them with other people, a talk which predominantly takes narrative form"<sup>3</sup> (Gillespie, 1995: 144). Gillespie details the fieldwork she did in ethnographic audience reception in a Southall, west London - a major centre of the Indian Diaspora. Gillespie analyses (amongst other things) the way Southall youth relate to the Australian soap opera, *Neighbours*, which revolves around the lives of average working-class families who live on the same street in an Australian town. Gillespie's in-depth interviews revealed that the Southall youth she interviewed derived a great deal of pleasure from talking to their friends about the soap. By indulging in 'soap talk' with their friends, the Southall teenagers were able to give vent to their own fears and concerns, using their identification with characters in the soap as a point of reference for discussing their own problems, as is evidenced in the following quote from Gillespie:

Talk about their viewing allows for the negotiation of what ought to be both in their social lives and in the soap world. It involves both realism and fantasy and is centrally focused on questions of morality. These negotiations are partly facilitated by the continuous soap text, which refuses closure and allows viewers to adopt a wandering point of view. (Gillespie, 1995: 149)

The open-endedness of the soap narrative allows for a greater range of readings than other forms of fictive narratives (see Gillespie, 1995), and makes possible, the 'wandering' point of



view referred to by Gillespie.

Mary Ellen Brown, in her analysis of the kind of pleasure women derive from watching soap opera, asserts that rather than being frustrated by the constant deferment of the resolution to problems in soap operas, the viewers interviewed, experienced the postponements in the nature of story problems similar to puzzles to be worked on for pleasure (see Brown, 1994), as suggested in the following quotation: "Sue: And you always know, if something doesn't work out, it will with somebody else later on. You always know that" (Brown, 1994: 92). Brown asserts that the ongoing puzzles presented in soaps offer tests of viewers' ability to "outguess the writing and production considerations inherent in the genre or to will something into being" (Brown, 1994: 92).

According to John Fiske, the connection between pleasure and meaning needs to be rethought. He believes that universalistic notions of pleasure derived from psychoanalytic theory do not get us very far in understanding something as varied as television (Fiske, 1994: 71). Fiske talks about the soap viewer's "willing suspension of disbelief", which he claims is central to the pleasures of viewing (see Fiske, 1994). It is a well-documented phenomenon that viewers of soap opera play with the boundary between the illusory world of their favorite soap, and the real world.

"Some viewers will conduct imaginary conversations with [soap] characters at times when they need comfort or advice, or even resort to writing to them when the character needs to be warned that something untoward is about to happen" notes Kilborn (1992: 12). Fiske claims that this kind of self-delusion is entered into knowingly by soap opera viewers to increase their pleasure, but that they can extricate themselves at will from this fantasy if

it ceases to be pleasurable (see Fiske, 1994). The ability to place oneself in, and extricate oneself from, the fictional world of the soap opera, is usually accompanied by "a critical awareness of the conventions of soap opera, and of its conditions of production" (Fiske, 1994: 71).

If one of the pleasures of viewing soap operas evolves from a strong sense of involvement, a further source of enjoyment is the never-ceasing speculation, which a serial promotes amongst its followers, as Kilborn points out:

Most fictional narratives are organized in order to promote feelings of expectation or tension, but soaps are particularly adept at stimulating many forms of conjecture. How long will it be before the character X finds out about Y's infidelity? And what chance does Z have of ever fully recovering from that blow to the head, which has led to such severe amnesia? Questions such as these form recurrent components of soap narratives and are at the very heart of soaps' continuing fascination. (Kilborn, 1992: 13)

Viewers derive a great deal of pleasure from guessing what developments are likely to take place in future episodes. The promise that the next day's episode will go some way towards resolving these uncertainties is part of the unwritten contract between producer and audience, but the pleasure for viewers lies in anticipating just how a particular character will be removed from, or become further entangled in, the crisis - whatever it may be (see Kilborn, 1992).

The students interviewed for this thesis went so far as to say

that they do not change from one channel to another while *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* are on in case they should miss how a particular scenario plays itself out, as evidenced in the following interview extract with a student called Jimmy who watches both soaps in the residence television room:

Michele: When you watch *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations* do you ever change the channel?

Jimmy: No they stick to one.

Michele: Why do you think that is?

Jimmy: When you are watching these soaps there is always an issue that needs to be addressed. We are always in suspense about what is going to happen, so if you change [channels] maybe you'll miss out on something or somebody is going to get caught. We like to remain focused.

Louise Spence notes that the conventions of soap opera narratives are so familiar and strong, that viewers watch not so much anticipating what will happen next, but rather to see *how* it will happen this time. All our memories of previous watching experiences are brought to bear on the viewing of a particular soap opera (see Spence, 1995). Jimmy revealed that his soap viewing experience allows him to make accurate predictions on what will happen in a particular set of circumstances on a soap opera, as he has identified a common formula in all of them. In the following extract I was speaking to Jimmy about Amber from *The Bold and the Beautiful*, who has fallen pregnant with Rick's (Forester) child. She lured him with her 'feminine wiles' into sleeping with her and has forced him to marry her even though she knows that he is in love with Kimberly. In addition, Amber had sex with another man, a singer by the name of Raymond (a black

man) at around the same time that she slept with Rick, and she is not sure the father really is. She has not told Rick about any of this and she lives in fear of the birth as given that she is white and Raymond is black, the father's identity will not be difficult to determine. She goes to have the baby at her mother's house in case it should turn out not to be Rick's. She gives birth to a baby which is definitely white and therefore Rick's, but the baby dies immediately after its birth. The midwife who delivers the baby also delivered Amber's cousin Becky's baby earlier the same day. Becky is giving her child up for adoption. They decide to take Becky's baby and pass it off as Amber's. Needless to say Becky is not aware of this. She thinks her child has been given up for adoption. Jimmy was very critical of Amber, accusing her of only being interested in Rick for his money and status.

Michele: Based on the number of soaps that you have watched, do you feel that characters like Amber usually get what they deserve in the end?

Jimmy: They do not survive. If one looks at *The Days* [*Days of Lives*], the events unfold and eventually a person like Sammy [an evil, manipulative character from *The Days*] was nailed. The same thing will apply to Amber and her relationship with Rick will not be sustained because she is lying.

As it happened, Jimmy turned out be correct and months later Amber was exposed and Rick divorced her.

The pleasure therefore, "is not in knowing, but in the process of knowing, in experiencing the new telling of what is recognized as the same old story" (Spence, 1995: 193). There is a certain feeling of security derived from watching the familiar, of having

seen the same scene play itself out in slightly varied circumstances on another soap opera, with different characters. Soap operas generally do not stray from the narrative conventions of the genre. It is perhaps this sense of familiarity, which keeps millions of viewers glued to their television sets at fixed times daily to view their favourite soap opera.

Louise Spence points out, that "[w]atching soaps is experiencing a fantasy which we believe to be true enough to warrant drawing moral conclusions, forming opinions, and comparing to what we know from the real world" (Spence, 1995: 188). Spence examines the blurring of the distinction between the reality of the viewer, and the fictional world of the soap opera. Through talking to women about their viewing experiences watching soaps, Spence found that "[i]f there is a blurring of distinctions, it is because neither fact nor interpretation can be taken as given" (Spence, 1995: 189). In her interviews with female viewers, Spence found that a great deal of the pleasure derived from watching soaps is the connection viewers feel with certain characters. As Spence points out:

Part of the process of watching soap operas is making friends with characters. In fact, we may feel that we know a character in a soap opera better than we know some of our own friends or colleagues. One woman I spoke to told me that she felt that she knew some of the characters on the show that she had been watching for eighteen years better than she knew herself. (Spence, 1995: 189)

Even though the experience of the woman described by Spence above is extreme, it is not uncommon to feel that certain characters on

a soap opera could become our friends in our daily lives (see Spence, 1995). Most of us are confronted with restrictions in the course of our everyday lives. We are limited in the sense that we are often unable to live out our fantasies and desires at will.

Perhaps soap operas' constant state of exaltation exhorts the world to live up to our expectations of it. We are able to provide ourselves with our own space, an elsewhere of our own pleasure and will...a world without shadow and twilight, a world where the divine functions [the fictional universe of the soap opera] (Spence, 1995: 193).

When I asked a student called Queen why she watched *The Bold and the Beautiful* her response indicated a passionate involvement with the lives of the characters, particularly Brooke and Taylor.

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold and the Beautiful*?

Queen: The personalities of the actors - they have got such style and whatever they do it's like they feel it inwardly - they know how to perform, to stimulate the interest of the audience. You learn about a lot of different situations and how to deal with them in life. Like in the case of Brooke and Taylor. Taylor shows how you must be down to earth no matter who you are and you will be rewarded for being this way like Taylor, who wins Ridge from Brooke.

Michele: Do you ever have arguments while you are watching?

Queen: Yes we do have arguments. For example in the case of Brooke and Taylor, some people prefer Brooke and I prefer Taylor because she is down to earth and others like Brooke saying she has suffered a lot and

that she really deserves Ridge.

Many of the students interviewed expressed strong feelings about the characters of Brooke and Taylor, which displayed a strong emotional involvement with them as if they were 'real' long-standing friends or enemies. Brooke and Taylor are constantly set up against one another in their battle to win the affection of Ridge Forester. Viewers are forced to choose sides. Although Brooke is the more tainted of the two characters, she is not *all* bad. The writers of *The Bold and the Beautiful* have cleverly given her enough of a heart to elicit sympathy from viewers. A student called Maphunye had the following to say:

Michele: Do you talk to people while watching *The Bold*?

Maphunye: Yes! There are Brooke lovers and Taylor lovers and we justify the behavior of each. Stephanie also as a mother is sometimes too much.

The students expressed strong emotional involvement with the characters on *Generations*, but no two characters elicited the kind of emotive responses that Brooke and Taylor did. The characters on *Generations* tend to be either *all* bad or *all* good with the result that most students chose the same characters as their favourites and least favourites. Brooke and Taylor create an interesting moral paradigm as the students' choice of either as their favorite indicated a great deal about their personalities. Brooke could be classified as the 'underdog' and those who sympathized with her tended to be less judgmental than the 'Taylor lovers', who expressed more moral rigidity and disdain for human weakness in general.

A great many followers of soaps when asked why they watch, will say that it provides an escape from the hassles of their everyday lives. Watching their favorite soap allows them to escape into a fantasy world for a half hour or so. A student by the name of Buhle had the following to say about why he watches *The Bold and the Beautiful*:

Michele: Why do you watch *The Bold*?

Buhle: I just watch it as entertainment. Everything in their world is like so perfect, not like in your own world. For example *The Bold and the Beautiful* is set in the fashion world, I mean everything in their lives is different from what we live like in the real world - it's like a fantasy.

Interestingly, the idea of a escaping into another world was not cited by any of the students I interviewed as a reason for watching *Generations*. Although they expressed involvement with the characters and their lives, many cited curiosity about what a South African soap opera would be like as their initial motivation for watching. Buhle's reasons for watching *Generations* illustrate this.

Michele: What about *Generations*, why do you watch that?

Buhle: *Generations* I watch because it is a South African soapie and normally during the week when I don't have anything to do when I have finished my work I watch it, nothing more than that basically.

Michele: So basically you watch it because there is nothing else on?

Buhle: I do watch it but not as much as *The Bold and*



the *Beautiful* because sometimes I tend to find the acting a little pathetic. South African actors have been doing too much. If you watch the American soaps it's like they are talking to someone in real life - it looks more realistic. But in *Generations* you can see their expressions like stage acting - overdone.

Buhle's lack of genuine interest in *Generations* is in no way indicative of what the other students felt, but what can be generalized is his criticism of the quality of the acting. Even those students who said they were devoted followers of the soap compared the acting and production quality unfavourably with *The Bold and the Beautiful*. Some even went so far as to say that *Generations* is a 'local *Bold*'.

Jib Fowles (1992) picks up on the fact that both television and dreams make use of wish-fulfilling material. Things happen on television, which could never happen in real life. "Dreams and television are where desires get obliged" (Fowles, 1992: 39). Fowles points out that dreams and television have several shared qualities, namely that both are visual, often illogical, sometimes symbolic and wish-fulfilling. Just as people escape from the pressures of daily living through fantasies and dreams, so they enter into another world when they sit down to watch their favorite soap opera, a world where they can see their wishes and fantasies played out by the characters which people the soap opera community - "television characters are the best vehicles for the audience's longing for escape from workday constraints" (Fowles, 1992: 51). The following Chapter serves as a conclusion to the thesis, drawing all the elements of the research together.

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## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

"In Living Memory of Roland Barthes, who understood that a critic needs also to be a fan" (Masterman: 1984).

#### Soaps: international products

Margaret Mead wrote in 1974 that "[t]elelevision more than any other medium gives models to the American people - models for life as it is, or should, or can be lived" (Mead, 1974)<sup>1</sup>. Nowhere is Mead's comment more valid than in the genre of daytime soap opera. American soaps penetrate not only the American collective consciousness, but global consciousness as well, given their penetration into countries outside of America. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, *The Bold and the Beautiful* is seen by over 200 million viewers throughout the world, which gives one an idea of the extent to which American daytime soaps have penetrated the worldwide television market.

#### Family ties

*Generations*, South Africa's 'answer' to *The Bold* has captured the imaginations of particularly young black viewers in the country, who are also avid watchers of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. What I set out to do in this thesis, is examine how these two soap operas construct for the students I interviewed, "particular forms of

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<sup>1</sup> This quote is taken from: (Trust, 1995: 3).

knowledge and pleasure, making available particular identities and identifications" (Moores, 1990: 9) and how they interpret and decode *Generations* and *The Bold* in terms of their lived experiences. Both *Generations* and *The Bold* shape the social world of the students to greater and lesser degrees. The interviews revealed that the students feel they can learn 'life lessons' from the soaps, ranging from 'lessons' on romance to business savvy and family relationships.

The familial relationships of the Forrester family came up repeatedly during the interviews, particularly the bond between Stephanie Forrester and her children on *The Bold and the Beautiful*. The students (particularly the males) felt they could relate to the fact that she was very protective of her two sons as they had mothers who were the same way.

No mention was made in any of the interviews about the Moroka family on *Generations*. One would have expected that the students would find greater similarities between their families and the Morokas, given that they are a South African family, but this proved not to be the case. In fact, the opposite was true, in that the students found it difficult to identify characters on *Generations* who reminded them of people in their own lives, whereas with *The Bold*, they all readily volunteered examples. There was a strong sense of identification with the Forester family and their relationships.

The interviews revealed that it makes no difference where a soap opera is set, what language the characters speak and to what race group they belong. As long as viewers can relate to them on an emotional level, there are no barriers.

### **Moral quandary**

Many soap 'denigrators' express concern at the fact that young people are subjected to soap opera 'values' and question how these values will affect them. I found from the interviews that the students were extremely astute in terms of what they chose to absorb from *Generations* and *The Bold*. They took out of the soaps what they felt was relevant to their own lives. For example, if they were having relationship problems in their own lives, they tended to focus on the romantic aspects of both soaps. Some on the other hand concentrated on 'learning' from their favourite characters about business and general life skills. The male students frequently cited Eric and Ridge Forrester from *The Bold* and Archie Moroka from *Generations* as their favourite characters, on whom they wanted to model their own lives.

After reviewing the interview tapes, it became clear to me that the students were in no moral 'danger' from these two soaps, but that on the contrary, they are experienced 'readers' of the genre. It was also apparent, that even in instances where the students expressed moral indignation at a storyline or character, they still, as Liebes and Katz (1993, 83) discovered in their study on

Dallas, found positive value in a programme even though they knew it was sometimes morally reprehensible. A male student called Singiphile, had the following to say

Singiphile: I sometimes hate the things they show on *The Bold*, like a man going after his brother's wife [Thorne pursuing Taylor]. I also don't like that Brooke was married to both Eric and Ridge, who are father and son. This kind of thing teaches people immoral things. I still watch it, even though they sometimes do things I don't like.

### **Communal Viewing**

One of the main aspects of the students' viewing of *The Bold* and *Generations* which I wanted to explore, was the social communal television room in the residences where they watch. Austin. S. Babrow notes that students all over the world make up a substantial portion of the soap viewing audience (Barrow, 1990: 343). He also states that "[A]ll argue that communication, whatever its form, must be understood as a contextually bound social accomplishment" (Babrow, 1990: 343). This is particularly true with the students I interviewed. Their entire viewing experience takes place in a structured social context with their peers, which is what makes their viewing distinctive. The way the students interact when they are watching shapes in part the meanings they attach to *The Bold and Generations*. Interaction and discussion is immediate and intense. D. Lemish describes the collective experience of social or public soap viewing as follows:

(V)iewers in campus locations were not a mere aggregate of individuals, each involved in his or her own viewing experience. Rather, viewers were a social collective, as short lived as it was, with a shared group spirit. Viewers shared information, opinions, and personal feelings with total strangers. Together they laughed at humor, giggled at commercials, clapped hands and cheered, moaned in shock, and sighed in great relief. They gathered temporary leaders, had a sense of responsibility to each other, and passed essential information around the room. (Lemish, 1990: 344)<sup>2</sup>

The students in Lemish's study reported that they had watched soaps while living at home, but that viewing in a social context at university added a new dimension to their soap opera viewing experience. As it is, soap operas "provide the raw materials from which roles and social relationships are formed" (Babrow, 1990: 344), this is simply intensified in a communal social viewing context.

The students I interviewed were different from Lemish's group, in that they were used to watching soaps as a group with family, friends and neighbours, as many of them lived in areas where not every household has its own television set, and it is common practice for friends and neighbours to gather together to watch. The difference

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<sup>2</sup> Lemish's study is quoted in (Babrow, 1990: 343)

for them was that at university they were without the influence of family and were watching with friends, which allowed them a greater degree of freedom to discuss certain issues (such as sex) which they would not be comfortable talking about with their parents or grandparents or even siblings present.

The discussions I witnessed between students in the residence television rooms and in individual rooms where groups were gathered to watch, were often extremely forthright and heated, with students not being afraid to disagree with one another. In the advertisement breaks the atmosphere was sometimes more like a forum for public debate than a social gathering. The interviewees reported in their interviews that discussions would often get intense, particularly around sensitive issues such as rape, AIDS or sex. They indicated in their interviews that discussions sometimes centred on what would happen next and arguments would break out.

What came out of the interviews was that if a favourite character behaved badly or did not get what he or she wanted, the students would express disappointment and upset, especially if they were being taunted by other students who favoured the character who *did* get what they wanted at the expense of another's favourite. This was particularly evident where Brooke and Taylor from *The Bold and the Beautiful* were concerned, with students taking sides regarding which one of them should get to be with Ridge Forrester.

Lemish's study took place in student union viewing rooms and in the lounge of a sports complex: "viewing environments that stimulate sociality, viewing environments where soap operas provide a social glue" (Babrow, 1990: 346). The students I interviewed watch in the residences where they live, which means they do not have to go out of their way to watch. Given that students gather in the television room with the sole purpose of watching television, everyone present is there with the same intention: to watch either *The Bold* or *Generations*. The students made it clear that nothing else is watched at the times that these two soaps are on air, and that no-one would dream of suggesting that they watch something else. There is in a sense a tacit agreement between the students that you are either there to watch these two soaps or not - it is similar to a club with membership rules.

The study conducted by Babrow (1990) focused on students who watch soaps in bars. What he discovered, was that not all the students in the bar during the screening of the soap *All My Children* were there to watch, unlike the students I interviewed, who gathered in the television rooms with the sole purpose of watching *The Bold* and *Generations*. Given that some of the patrons in the bars were there to eat and drink, Babrow notes that there was a great deal of noise while *All My Children* was on, and that for some it just seemed to function as background noise.



The respondents I interviewed took their viewing extremely seriously, and there was no discussion about anything other than the two soaps while they on. During crucial scenes, there was no talking at all. The students showed a higher degree of involvement than those researched by Babrow. For Babrow's students, the watching of *All My Children* appeared to be a secondary activity, the foremost one being to socialise. For the respondents in my study, the social aspect was an offshoot of their soap viewing, and not their primary reason for gathering together. As Babrow points out, "[E]xtant research suggests that entertainment is a major motivation for student soap opera watching and that entertainment is related to program-focused sociality" (Babrow, 1990: 350).

Watching with friends is certainly an important aspect of soap viewing for the respondents in this study, but as stated earlier, the main reason for getting together is to watch. Even the students who had television sets in their rooms reported that they never watched alone. For the students, given that they were used to watching communally even in their homes, the concept of watching a soap alone is completely foreign, so even when they have the choice to watch alone, they do not.

Much has been written on the talk and socialising which takes place before and after soap viewing, for example (Brown, 1994) and (Hobson, 1994), but given that in western countries soap viewing is generally an individual rather than a group activity, the nature of communal soap

viewing has not been extensively explored. The pleasures derived from communal soap viewing are in some cases "unanticipated consequences of soap opera watching (Lemish, 1990: 350). For the students I interviewed, watching communally is second nature - they have little or no experience of isolated individual viewing. Watching as a group is therefore a crucial aspect of their viewing pleasure. The opportunity to talk and argue with friends and discuss what will happen next are not pleasures they are used to deferring, they are immediate. Even though they clearly stated that *Generations* and *The Bold* form part of their general discussions with peers outside of viewing times, one of the primary pleasures they derive is from interaction while watching.

#### **How soaps are structured to facilitate social viewing pleasure**

The very nature of soap operas makes them ideally suited to the kind of social viewing described in this thesis. For example, the fact that soaps move so slowly makes audience interaction possible and facilitates shared construction of meaning. "Slow repetitious unfolding makes the noise and distraction of audience interaction less threatening to requisite understanding and appreciation" (Babrow, 1990: 357) than other genres such as dramas, action series' or sitcoms.

One of the pleasures described by the students when watching soaps is that of predicting how events will unfold. The students said that there was a great deal of

discussion and argument over what would happen next, particularly with *The Bold*. The suspension of a plotline and dramatic tension "provoke the viewing imagination, there may be pleasures in both successful and unsuccessful predictions about the resolution of that line" (Babrow, 1990: 357). The dramatic tension between Brooke and Taylor on *The Bold* is illustrative of this aspect of pleasure. The students were passionate about which one of the women should end up with Ridge Forrester, but even when they proved to be wrong, it did not detract from their pleasure.

**Why do they watch?**

The following is a summary of the reasons students gave for watching *The Bold* and *Generations*

REASONS	EXAMPLES
RECREATION	TO RELAX AND ESCAPE FROM DAILY STRESS
TIME TO WASTE	NOTHING BETTER TO DO
LEARNING	INSIGHT INTO RELATIONSHIPS AND OTHER WAYS OF LIFE
CURIOSITY	WANTING TO SEE HOW <i>GENERATIONS</i> COMPARES WITH <i>THE BOLD</i>
IDENTITY	RELATING TO CHARACTERS
QUALITY	COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE BOLD AND GENERATIONS: ACTING, SETS, WARDROBE, CONTENT
ENTERTAINMENT AND EXCITEMENT	THE SUSPENSE AND TENSION OF GUESSING WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT AND HOW.

SOCIAL INTERACTION	FEELING EXCLUDED FROM CONVERSATIONS IF YOU DON'T WATCH
REALISM	PORTRAYAL OF SITUATIONS ONE COULD ENCOUNTER IN REAL LIFE

Interestingly, the reasons the students gave for watching *The Bold* are consistent with the findings of most soap opera audience studies, whereas the reasons they provided for watching *Generations* are not entirely. In spite of the fact that the interviews revealed an involvement and interest in *Generations* and its characters, they also revealed a greater degree of emotional involvement with *The Bold and the Beautiful*.

Although it is impossible to quantify the level of attachment in concrete terms, it was evident from the tone, length and intensity of the students' responses to my questions. Questions on *The Bold* elicited lengthier more emotionally charged responses, unlike the responses to questions on *Generations*, which tended to be more stilted and less emotionally charged. It was as if the students had appointed themselves critics as well as viewers of *Generations* - it is being watched not just as a soap, but as a *South African* soap, which means they hold it up to a higher degree of scrutiny than they do *The Bold*.

This tends to affect the suspension of disbelief synonymous with soap viewing, as the students are not merely watching the story unfold, they are simultaneously checking whether or not the characters and stories are

credible in the context of the South African society with which they are familiar. The result is, that they will more readily accept stories on *The Bold* than they will on *Generations*, where they are constantly asking themselves 'Could this happen here?'. This is not to say that there is no emotional involvement with the characters on *Generations*. The interviews revealed that there definitely is a level of emotional involvement, it is just not as strong as that displayed for *The Bold*. Liebes and Katz (1993) identified "hot and cognitively cool types of involvement" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 152) where soap audiences are concerned, indicating levels of intensity of involvement. Using this as a scale of measurement, I would classify the involvement of the students with *The Bold* as 'hotter' than their involvement with *Generations*.

### **Fantasy**

Soaps offer viewers the opportunity to fantasize. Many of the students expressed a desire to be like certain of the characters. Taylor from *The Bold* appears to be a role model for the females, while Eric and Ridge impressed the male viewers. Some also expressed admiration for and a desire to be like Archie Moroka from *Generations*. None of the girls named a female character on *Generations* they would like to emulate.

*The Bold* seemed to fill the role of fantasy creation more than *Generations*. The students commented on aspects of *The Bold* such as the wardrobes of the characters and

their lavish surroundings with awe and approbation, whereas they tended to view *Generations* as a cheaper looking production in terms of the wardrobe and sets.

Some students also commented on the fact that they felt the acting on *Generations* was not as convincing as that on *The Bold*, a factor which serves to lessen the suspension of disbelief of the students while simultaneously lessening their ability to fantasise.

### **Soaps and the creation of identity**

Chris Barker (1997) conducted a study on teenage soap viewers and their processes of identity construction. He interviewed British Asian and Afro-Caribbean girls and how they use soaps to produce multiple hybrid identities. As Barker points out, language is a resource "in lending form to ourselves and our world out of the contingent and disorderly flow of everyday talk and practice" (Barker, 1997: 611). Soap talk is the ideal vehicle through which young people can explore issues such as sex and relationships, as soaps facilitate discussion around these subjects. Given the way that soaps work at creating bonds between viewers and characters, they become like people we know and care about (or hate), so talking about the problems characters are having seems as natural as discussing the dilemmas of close friends.

All the students I interviewed indicated that soaps taught them about male/female relationships. Some even went so far as to emulate the actions of characters in

relationships in their own lives. All of us have different aspects to our identities, which are moulded on a variety of life experiences, such as family relationships, religion and culture. The interviews with the students for this study revealed that both *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* play a role in the construction of romantic identity. The girls indicated time and again how soaps taught them that men generally behave badly and are not to be trusted, while the boys pointed out that soaps taught them how to 'handle' women, so they play a role in the construction of their 'romantic selves' as well. As a male student called Christopher said in his interview

Christopher: It [*The Bold*] teaches me about life and love and all those things. I want to learn how to behave and treat other people and *The Bold* shows me these things.

The tendency of the students to use *Generations* and particularly *The Bold* as a guide for how to behave in romantic relationships, may well give moralists cause for concern, but as stated previously, the students are astute enough to incorporate what they see on soaps within their existing moral framework learned from family and religion, friends and cultural practices. Evidence of this came out of the interviews I conducted. When students encountered examples of behaviour on the soaps which conflicted with their own moral standards, they were quick to condemn and reject the displayed behaviour. One example of the kind of behaviour some found

objectionable was Brooke's affairs with all the Forester men. Some said that this kind of thing would never happen in their culture and they rejected Brooke's behaviour. Archie (*Generations*) and Ridge and Eric (*The Bold*) were admired by both the male and female students. All three men are successful in business and are appealing to women. A female student called Mpume said she lives in hope that her boyfriend will pick up tips from Ridge.

Mpume: I would like my boyfriend to behave like Ridge. Ridge is a romantic guy, and I want my boyfriend to do the things for me that Ridge does for women because that is what relationships should be like.

#### **What relation do soaps bear to the lives of the students?**

As has been stated throughout this thesis, soaps are able to transcend cultural and language barriers because of the universal emotional appeal their characters have. The students expressed skepticism where *Generations* was concerned as to whether it related at all to their own lived experience. Ten of the forty students (25%) I interviewed said that *Generations* was more realistic than *The Bold*. Vicky had the following to say:

Vicky: Because *Generations* is South African makes it more realistic for me. In *The Bold* they only focus on love issues and affairs, but *Generations* talks about all aspects of our lives - people working etc.



The remaining 75% said that they felt *The Bold* was more realistic than *Generations*. A female student by the name of Hlalanathi had the following to say:

Hlalanathi: I am more interested in *The Bold* than *Generations*. Maybe it's because I expect more from the characters on a South African soap. For me, *Generations* does not portray South Africa, it portrays America, which is disappointing.

None of the forty students I interviewed said that the fact that *The Bold* is American was in any way a hindrance in their ability to become emotionally involved with the characters.

As with Liebes and Katz's respondents in their *Dallas* study, the students I interviewed are not passive recipients of media messages. Their readings of both *The Bold* and *Generations* are negotiated. Liebes and Katz state that it is "more than trivial" for researchers to differentiate between "viewers who use *Dallas* as a guide to reality and those who use it as an aesthetic game" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 19). I am inclined to agree with them, as the interviews with the respondents showed that their consumption of *The Bold* and *Generations* is a combination of both.

#### **Patterns of involvement**

Liebes and Katz (1993, 152) distinguished two broad categories of involvement in *Dallas*, namely the

referential and the critical. Within the category of referential, they make a distinction between two types, the one "makes serious equations between the story and life; the other treats the program more playfully, subjunctively, and interactively" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 152). The students in my study, displayed both these types of responses, but there was a marked tendency for them to make more connections between their own lives and the lives of the characters on *The Bold*, than with the characters on *Generations*. They readily related events in their own experience to those of the characters. For example, a male student called Singiphile related a storyline involving Brooke and Eric's son, Rick, to his own experience of the world. He said he thought Rick was doing the right thing marrying his girlfriend, Amber, whom he had made pregnant. He married Amber in spite of his family's vehement objections. Singiphile said that if he got a girl pregnant, he would not necessarily marry her, but he would take care of her and the child. He expressed admiration for Rick and what he was doing, especially since Rick had just left high school and was on his way to university.

The students made far fewer connections between incidents and events on *Generations* and their own lives. They displayed however, a great deal of critical involvement, commenting on the quality of the acting, sets, costumes and lifestyles of the characters, which in many instances they felt were not related to their own. Though there were elements of referential involvement with *Generations*

involving comparisons with their own experiences, it was far less prominent than with *The Bold*.

The playful referential involvement described by Liebes and Katz was evident with both *Generations* and *The Bold*, with students commenting on the enjoyment they derived from derived from speculating on the outcomes of storylines, of talking about characters and events with friends and of escaping from their own problems into the fictional soap opera world, which provided them with a distraction and a way of relaxing.

### **The moral viewer**

An element of soap opera viewing described by Liebes and Katz is that of moral judgment passed by viewers on the characters and their lifestyles. They noted that the moralising statements tended to be couched in the language of 'we':

"Their women are immoral; our Arab women would not behave that way". Less moralizing statements come either in the language of "they" (businessmen, for example), for those who generalize from the program to the universals of life, and in the language of 'I' and 'you', for those who treat program and life more playfully (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 152).

I found the same tendencies amongst the students I interviewed. Some of the scenarios on *The Bold* and *Generations* came under moral censure from the students. A

female student called Queen<sup>3</sup> was critical of the character Queen on *Generations*. Queen is a larger than life individual. She is in many respects a caricature of an indulged, selfish, vacuous, wealthy woman.

Queen: Sometimes *Generations* is unrealistic. Let's take Queen for example. The way she acts is unrealistic. I have seen bitchy people around, but the problem with Queen is that she does things we have never seen in real life - we have never seen a bitch behaving like that. A lot of times she over-acts.

What is interesting here, is the way Queen moves from 'I' to 'we' in her criticism of her namesake. I noted in the interviews that whenever the students objected to the behaviour of certain characters, on both *The Bold* and *Generations*, they distanced themselves from the soaps by creating a 'us' v.s. 'them' dynamic, as Queen does.

Brooke's behaviour on *The Bold* with her multiple relationships with men from the same family, elicited criticism from some of the students, who said that in their culture that kind of behaviour would not be tolerated. A male student called Leslie gave the following reason for watching *The Bold*

Leslie: There are some things that I actually learn because you see the difference between life overseas and life here in South Africa. Like the way they do

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<sup>3</sup> The student's name happened to be Queen.

things is different from the way we do things, like parents are not harsh with their children the way they can be here. Children can talk to their parents about girlfriends and boyfriends, but with us here in South Africa it's not that simple to talk to parents about these things.

The propensity to "generalise from the programme to the universals of life expressed in the language of 'I' and 'you' (Liebes and Katz, 1993: 152) was also present with the students I interviewed. A female student called Luleka related how the rape of Jessica Forester on *The Bold* by a man she had rejected reminded her of how her sister reacted when she was raped by a man who had asked her to marry him and whom she had refused. Like Jessica on *The Bold and the Beautiful*, Luleka's sister didn't want anyone to know.

**Is America 'bigger', 'bolder' and more 'beautiful' than South Africa?**

The trend amongst the students to rate the quality and standard of *The Bold* above that of *Generations* was striking. All the students rated *The Bold* a better production than its South African counterpart in terms of acting, set design, and wardrobe. A female student called Nontobeko commented on the fact that the wardrobe on *Generations* is limited and that she often notices characters wearing the same clothes more than once, whereas the wardrobes of the characters on *The Bold* struck her as enormous and impressive.

A male student called Siyabonga said that even though he felt there was room for improvement on the production standards of *Generations*, he made allowances for the fact that "it is a South African soapie, and we don't have the same resources that the Americans have". Even though the students were critical of *Generations*, they were magnanimous as well in the sense that they felt given time, *Generations* would improve.

Another form of criticism levelled at *Generations* by the students, was the fact that it was too American, and did not really reflect characters or situations with which the students were familiar as South Africans. A male student called Sizwe said that *Generations* was unrelated to his experiences as a young black South African. He said of *Generations*: "It's got this element of the elite class, it's not related to everyday life in this country". Another male student, Hlengiwe, said that *Generations* was trying to copy *The Bold*. "The things they [the characters on *Generations*] say and do are just like on *The Bold*."

The general feeling amongst the students was that even though the characters on *Generations* were superficially recognizable in the sense that they are mostly young black South Africans, their lives and actions are not necessarily similar. Given that they have expectations of encountering characters just like themselves, there is a sense of disappointment when this proves not to be the case. Ironically, with *The Bold and the Beautiful*, where the students have no anticipation of finding characters

who look and speak like them, they immediately go to the emotional core of each character to find similarities between the characters and themselves, and they have no difficulty in doing so. None of the students hesitated when asked to name their favourite or least favourite characters on *The Bold*, and they readily produced examples of people who reminded them of characters on the soap.

Shilela, a male student said he knew a guy who reminds of Ridge on *The Bold*, as he "messes around with other girls even though he has a girlfriend". A female student called Siyanda said she was at school with a girl who reminded her of Stephanie Forester from *The Bold and the Beautiful*, as she "poked her nose in everyone's business."

### **In conclusion**

A common assumption is that

people are not critical of television programmes in any informed or informative sense. They may be either accepting or rejecting, but not critical. Thus the audience is frequently described as mindless, indiscriminating, duped, vulnerable, and so forth (Livingstone and Lunt, 1994: 71).

Nowhere is this more true than where daytime soap opera viewers are concerned. In the hierarchy of television viewers, they are usually at the bottom, being frequently

given the least credit for any critical faculties or intelligence. The students I interviewed for this thesis proved this notion to be completely false. They displayed an acute awareness of how soap operas are constructed, based on the years that they have spent watching, as well as an ability to construct their own interpretations of *The Bold and the Beautiful* and *Generations*. Their interpretive skills are based on a combination of their understanding of how the genre works, their own social and moral codes of behaviour, and their interactions and discussions with their peers who also watch both soaps. They showed an ability to integrate what they were watching into their own codes of behaviour and values, and made choices on whether or not to accept what they were watching, based on this.

Every day approximately 4 million viewers tune in to watch *Generations* in its prime time slot at 8:00 pm on SABC 1, while approximately 2,5 million people tune in to watch *The Bold and the Beautiful* on the same channel in a much earlier time slot (6:00 pm). As mentioned in Chapter 4 of this thesis, it is difficult to compare viewership figures of two soaps in different time slots. What is relevant, is that both feature consistently in the top ten shows on SABC, and *The Bold and the Beautiful* appeals to a broader cross-section of the South African population than *Generations*, which attracts a largely young black viewership.

The audience figures however tell us nothing about how the audience interprets what they watch, and their level



of involvement in what they are watching. What I discovered during the interviews with the students, is that there is a greater level of emotional involvement in *The Bold* than in *Generations*, and that they watch *Generations* partially in an attempt to assess and evaluate how a local soap opera compares with American soap operas. I also discovered that *The Bold* and the *Beautiful* is the benchmark against which they measure *all* other soap operas.

A telling fact which came out of the interviews was that the students said *Generations* was in many respects unrelated to their own lived experiences as young black South Africans, and that it is in many ways Americanized. This is a sentiment shared by two of the soap's stars, Sello Maake ka Ncube (Archie) and Lillian Dube (Masibobe), both of whom have left the soap because they feel it does not reflect the lives of black South Africans. In an article in one of the country's leading newspapers, *The Sunday Times* in 2001, ka Ncube is quoted as saying "This soapie's too white for me! The characters speak like white people. Even the depiction of life is influenced by white values. The script isn't real to black people in South Africa today" (quoted in *True Love*, November 2002: 122).

The soap's producers would argue that the viewership figures indicate the public's approval of *Generations*. There is no disputing that the soap is watched by young black South Africans, but the figures do not reflect the nature of pleasure they derive from watching. As the

interviews I conducted show, even though the students were watching *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful*, the nature of involvement and pleasure differed. What one also has to bear in mind, is that *Generations* occupies a prime time slot even though it follows the format of daytime soap opera, and it has no competition from any other daily shows in the same time slot on any of the other channels. As John Fiske points out however, the sad truth is that producers do not necessarily care what meanings and pleasures audiences derive from the shows they produce, as "their concern is solely with the headcount and the demographics" (Fiske, 1994: 62).

What I hoped to achieve in this thesis is to provide some insight and understanding into the viewing pleasure of the young black students I interviewed and how they made sense of *Generations* and *The Bold*. My intention was not to validate the import of American TV shows into South Africa, or to denigrate local productions. When I recruited students, my only criteria was that they be watch both soaps a minimum of three times per week and that they be black Zulu-speaking students living in a university residence on the Natal University Durban campus. The fact that it emerged from the interviews that they are more critical of *Generations* than of *The Bold*, was not something I anticipated or prefigured when I began doing research.

The viewing context was an essential part of the pleasure of watching for the students, and they were not used to viewing any other way. Their talk around soaps began

while watching and was continued after, unlike so many studies, which indicate that soap viewing occurs in isolation and discussion occurs after the viewing moment (Hobson, 1994).

Peter Conrad describes soaps as "a world of fidgety existential dubiety, in which a multitude of happenings - of arbitrary and inane comings and goings" (Conrad, 1982: 75). His description of the soap opera world is alarmingly similar to the way many of us would describe our daily lives, which is why soaps hold so much appeal for viewers. Soap operas are in many respects like a parallel universe which exists in the same time and space as our own.

When Liebes and Katz embarked on their cross-cultural analysis of viewers of *Dallas*, they noted that decoding is an interaction between the culture of the viewer and the culture of the producer (Liebes and Katz, 1993: x). What they set out to do was analyse different cultural groups' responses to one soap opera, *Dallas*. What I set out to do, was examine one cultural group's responses to two soap operas, one set in their own country and one American. What I discovered, was that like Liebes and Katz's respondents with *Dallas*, the students use *Generations* and *The Bold and the Beautiful* to "map their social relations within a nation or a family... [and] decode such material critically" (Liebes and Katz, 1993: x).

I would like to leave the reader with the following thought by way of conclusion. Ethnographic work (in the sense of drawing on what we can perceive and experience in everyday settings),

Acquires its critical mark when it functions as a reminder that reality is always more complicated and diversified than our theories can represent, and that there is no such thing as 'audience' whose characteristics can be set once and for all (Ang, 1994: 110).

# APPENDIX 1

## TOP2097

Day	Date	From	To	Station	Title	Black Adults U: 5346 S:1393	Black Adults Minimum estimated viewers	English Adults U:2499 S:413 AR	English Adults Minimum estimated viewers	Afrikaans Adults U:3541 S:528 AR	Afrikaans Adults Minimum estimated viewers
Sat	15/11/97	20:07	20:59	S1	Mabaleng: Soccer	26.4	1411344	7.7	192423	3.8	134558
Mon	17/11/97	20:02	20:30	S2	Suburban Bliss	22	1176120	6.8	169932	10.4	368264
Mon	10/11/97	20:01	20:30	S2	Suburban Bliss	21	1122660	8.2	204918	9.7	343477
Sat	22/11/97	20:00	21:59	S1	Miss World Beauty Pageant	19,9	1063854	11	274890	8.6	304526
Sat	15/11/97	19:00	19:54	S1	Mabaleng: Soccer	23.5	1256310	6.8	169932	4	141640
Sat	15/11/97	19:57	20:06	S1	Xhosa News	24.2	129732	6.4	159936	2.6	92066
Mon	10/11/97	17:30	18:19	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	16.1	860706	11.4	284886	9.7	343477
Wed	05/11/97	17:30	18:17	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	15.3	817938	9.8	244902	10.6	375346
Tue	11/11/97	20:01	20:32	S1	Missing Link	22.8	1218888	3.7	92463	3.5	123935
Wed	12/11/97	20:04	20:35	S1	Soul City	22.5	1202850	3.6	89964	2	70820
Tue	11/11/97	17:30	18:16	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	15.6	833976	7.8	194922	8.8	311608
Mon	03/11/97	20:03	20:30	S2	Suburban Bliss	17.3	924858	4.6	114954	8.2	290362
Sun	16/11/97	14:29	17:00	S2	T/Sport: Soccer	17.9	956934	2.8	69972	8.1	266821
Tue	18/11/97	20:01	20:34	S1	Missing Link	21.6	1154736	2.1	52479	3.1	109771
Thu	13/11/97	17:30	18:16	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	14.5	775170	10.6	264894	7.6	269116
Tue	04/11/97	20:04	20:34	S1	Missing Link	21.5	1149390	3.2	79968	2.3	81443

Wed	12/11/97	17:30	18:17	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	15.7	839322	9.2	229908	6.4	226624
Thu	20/11/97	20:05	20:29	S1	Generations	20.3	1085238	3.5	87465	3.1	109771
Thu	20/11/97	17:30	18:17	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	15.4	823284	7.9	197421	7.5	265575
Tue	18/11/97	17:30	18:20	S1	The Bold and the Beautiful	14.5	775170	8.2	204918	8.7	308067

APPENDIX 2

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULTS

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
T/SPORT: CRICKET WORLD CUP 1999 (Sat)	13.4
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	11.6
T/SPORT: CRICKET (Sat)	11.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	10.1
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	10.1
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Fri)	9.9
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	9.7
PANASONIC SPOTLIGHT (Sat)	9.3
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	8.1
T/SPORT (Sat)	8.0

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
OUT OF THE BLUE (Sun)	11.6
T/SPORT: CRICKET WORLD CUP 1999 (Sat)	11.2
T/SPORT: CRICKET (Sat)	10.8
PANASONIC SPOTLIGHT (Sat)	9.1
T/SPORT (Sat)	9.0
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	8.9
MABALENG SPORT: VODACOM RUGBY FOCUS (Sat)	8.7
T/SPORT: CRICKET WORLD CUP 1999 (Sat)	8.1
TWO BITS AND PEPPER (Sun)	8.0
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	7.6
MARTIN (Thu)	7.6
T/SPORT (Sat)	7.6
MABALENG SPORT (Sat)	7.6



SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULTS

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Thu)	35.0
BOOMSPRUIT (Thu)	34.8
GENERATIONS (Wed)	31.1
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	29.9
GENERATIONS (Tue)	29.0
GENERATIONS (Fri)	27.9
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	27.3
LIKELY SUSPECTS (Wed)	25.5
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	23.4
JAM ALLY (Fri)	22.5

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Wed)	37.1
GENERATIONS (Fri)	32.1
BOOMSPRUIT (Thu)	30.8
GENERATIONS (Thu)	30.6
LIKELY SUSPECTS (Wed)	30.2
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	28.0
GENERATIONS (Tue)	27.6
JAM ALLY (Fri)	25.0
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	24.7
ZULU NEWS (Fri)	23.7

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULTS

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Thu)	20.6
BOOMSPRUIT (Thu)	19.6
GENERATIONS (Wed)	17.2
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	17.1
GENERATIONS (Tue)	16.9
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	15.9
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	15.5
GENERATIONS (Fri)	15.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	14.9
LIKELY SUSPECTS (Wed)	14.9

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

MON 10/05/99 TO SUN 16/05/99

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Wed)	22.9
GENERATIONS (Fri)	19.8
BOOMSPRUIT (Thu)	19.2
GENERATIONS (Thu)	18.7
LIKELY SUSPECTS (Wed)	18.4
GENERATIONS (Tue)	18.0
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	17.1
MARTIN (Thu)	16.6
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	15.8
JAM ALLY (Fri)	15.4

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	13.2
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	11.4
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	10.9
MUSIC (Thu)	10.5
TOFFSY (Thu)	9.8
Music (Wed)	9.5
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Fri)	9.5
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	9.3
MUSIC (Tue)	9.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	8.9

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	16.8
MUSIC (Sun)	15.3
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	15.0
MUSIC (Wed)	14.0
JAM ALLY (Fri)	13.8
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	13.8
MUSIC (Wed)	13.7
Compass (Wed)	13.2
Toffsy (Thu)	12.7
Music (Thu)	12.6

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Tue)	31.1
GENERATIONS (Wed)	29.7
GENERATIONS (Thu)	29.7
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	28.9
ABAKWAZIDENGE (Thu)	27.3
GENERATIONS (Fri)	27.2
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	26.2
Xhosa News (Thu)	25.7
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	24.5
MUSIC (Wed)	24.2

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Thu)	31.8
GENERATIONS (Tue)	30.8
ABAKWAZIDENGE (Thu)	30.4
GENERATIONS (Wed)	29.5
GENERATIONS (Fri)	26.6
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	24.7
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	24.5
V.I.P (Sat)	24.2
JAM ALLY (Fri)	23.7
MUSIC (Wed)	23.0



SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Thu)	17.8
GENERATIONS (Wed)	17.5
GENERATIONS (Tue)	17.3
MUSIC (Wed)	16.6
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	16.5
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	16.5
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	16.0
GENERATIONS (Fri)	15.9
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	15.8
MUSIC (Thu)	15.5

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

MON 15/05/2000 TO SUN 21/05/2000

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
GENERATIONS (Thu)	
GENERATIONS (Tue)	
GENERATIONS (Wed)	
JAM ALLY (Fri)	
ABAKWAZIDENGE (Thu)	
GENERATIONS (Fri)	
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	
MUSIC (Sun)	
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	
MUSIC (Wed)	

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	15.0
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	14.2
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Fri)	14.0
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	13.5
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Wed)	13.5
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	12.9
MUSIC (Wed)	12.6
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	12.6
MUSIC (Fri)	12.6
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	12.5

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

ENGLISH / AFRIKAANS

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Mon)	14.2
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Fri)	13.1
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Thu)	13.1
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Mon)	11.6
DAYS OF OUR LIVES (Tue)	11.6
MUSIC (Mon)	11.2
DARKWING DUCK (Fri)	11.1
MUSIC (Fri)	10.9
MUSIC (Thu)	10.8
CHARMED (Sun)	10.5

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
YIZO-YIZO (Tue)	33.3
GENERATIONS (Tue)	30.7
GENERATIONS (Thu)	30.2
HLALA KWABAFILEYO (Thu)	29.6
GENERATIONS (Fri)	29.1
GENERATIONS (Wed)	29.0
XHOSA NEWS (Tue)	26.9
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	26.5
XHOSA NEWS (Thu)	26.5
ZULU NEWS (Fri)	24.0

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

NGUNI / SOTHO

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
YIZO-YIZO (Tue)	34.2
GENERATIONS (Thu)	32.7
GENERATIONS (Wed)	32.4
GENERATIONS (Fri)	32.2
HLALA KWABAFILEYO (Thu)	31.6
GENERATIONS (Tue)	31.4
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	29.5
ZULU NEWS (Fri)	26.9
ZULU NEWS (Sun)	26.5
XHOZA NEWS (Thu)	25.8

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

ADULT

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
YIZO-YIZO (Tue)	20.4
GENERATIONS (Tue)	19.5
GENERATIONS (Thu)	18.5
GENERATIONS (Wed)	18.3
GENERATIONS (Fri)	18.2
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Wed)	17.4
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Fri)	17.0
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Thu)	16.9
HLALA KWABAFILEYO (Thu)	16.8
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Tue)	16.6

SAARF Television Audience Measurement Survey

CHILDREN

MON 07/05/2001 TO SUN 13/05/2001

TOP TEN PROGRAMMES	
SABC 1	AR
YIZO-YIZO (Tue)	23.9
GENERATIONS (Thu)	23.2
GENERATIONS (Fri)	22.7
GENERATIONS (Tue)	22.7
GENERATIONS (Wed)	22.6
HLALA KWABAFILEYO (Thu)	20.9
ZULU NEWS (Wed)	19.1
CHARMED (Sun)	18.6
THE BOLD AND THE BEAUTIFUL (Mon)	17.8
ZULU NEWS (Fri)	17.6



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