



**An Investigation into the Effects of Local Television Soap Operas on Romantic Relationships Among University of KwaZulu-Natal's Undergraduate Students on the Pietermaritzburg Campus**

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## DECLARATION

I, Palesa Agnes Mahlatsi declare that this study is my original work. All citations and references used throughout the study have been acknowledged accordingly.

**Signature**

  
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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Joseph and Mamolleloa Mahlatsi. Thank you for believing in me, for all the sacrifices you made for me, for being my pillar of strength, for being patient with me and most importantly for your prayers throughout my studies. Without your support, my dream would not have become a reality. I know you are proud of me.

## ABSTRACT

Despite their popularity, few studies have thoroughly investigated the content of local romantic soap operas and their effects on viewers. This study was conducted to address this gap. This study initially explored the effects of local television soap operas on romantic relationships amongst UKZN undergraduate students on the Pietermaritzburg campus. Of particular interest was the way in which university students engaged with soap operas and how they perceived their gender roles within romantic relationships in relation to intimate relationships portrayed in soap operas. The study was positioned within a qualitative research paradigm conducted at UKZN Pietermaritzburg residences. This allowed for the examination, description and interpretation of the data developed throughout the focus groups and in-depth interviews. Convenience, purposive and snowballing procedures were adopted to select participants. A total of 30 undergraduate students participated in this study. Ten in-depth interviews and three focus groups of 6 to 8 participants were held. The focus group discussions and interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word. The data was analysed using a critical thematic analysis to formulate dominant themes within the data. Findings from this study indicated that soap operas have a huge effect on students' romantic relationships. Further findings were that although soap operas are informative, they can also be over-exaggerated in their portrayal of events. Participants indicated that this is however not entirely bad, as they use the watching of soap operas for relaxation and "escaping" their lives. They also argued that they learn from characters' experiences and use these lessons when faced with similar situations. Students interviewed stated that a character's ability to move on, personality characteristics, their earning capacity, physical beauty and relational skills were found to be key influencing factors on the choice of a romantic partner in soap operas. Nonetheless, study participants complained about the portrayal of women in soap operas, describing them as being misrepresented and undermined. Participants indicated that sexual activities on soap operas are over-exaggerated. In short, participants in the study felt that they never get what they expect in relationships when they have based their expectations on soap opera portrayals of relationships. They also pointed out that traditional gender roles and transactional relationships are very popular in soap opera portrayals, and this might unintentionally encourage the viewers to follow similar behaviours. To conclude,

the participants indicated that all the themes that emerged from the data have an influence in their relationships.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATM:	Automated Teller Machine
IBA:	Independent Broadcasting Authority
ICASA:	Independent Communications Authority of South Africa
SAARF:	South African Advertising Research Foundation
SABC:	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SCT:	Social Cognitive Theory
SATRA:	South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
TAMS:	Television Audience Measurement Survey
UJ:	University of Johannesburg
UKZN:	University of KwaZulu-Natal

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## CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

### 1.1 Introduction

Soap operas are very popular among young people whose general assumptions are that they display events close to what happens in real life. As Katz, Haas and Gurevitch (1973) put it, television is seen to be an essential agent of information and that one of its features is holding the attention of the viewer with entertaining scenes. It is then responsible for distributing information and being highly influential (Worden, 2013). The messages about romance and sex has an influence on youth who then look to media for advice in this arena (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). With little life experience to relate to, young people sometimes come to rely on the portrayal of cultural norms and relationships in frequently-viewed programmes. As a result, they can nurture unrealistic expectations about romance (Johnson & Holmes, 2009). It is therefore in the interest of this study to explore whether local soap operas have any effect on romantic relationships amongst UKZN undergraduate students.

### 1.2 Background

<sup>1</sup>Youth is a period when the influence of peer connections can take precedence over family relationships (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006) and sentimental relationships begin (Connolly & Mclsaac, 2011). Although parents and peers are an imperative source of dating information (Christenson et al., 2004; Brown, et al., 2005), teenagers and college students report that they also trust the media as a source of knowledge about intimacy (Aubrey et al., 2003). Media, and television specifically, are currently regarded as the basic instructors about sexual relationships for the young people (Ward, 2003). Subsequently, material from which viewers can develop and underwrite convictions about sexual relationships is aired. Scholarly research in South Africa shows that women consume more romantic media content than men (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). In spite of these inclinations, some men do report watching sentimental media. (Eggermont, 2006; Ter Bogt, et al., 2010).

Ward (2003) argued that across a number of studies, media, peers and schools are generally the top three sexual informants, with media ranking the top in significance. Youths in one

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<sup>1</sup>The study will adopt the African Youth Charter definition of youth (African Union,2006) which defines youths as those between the ages of 15 to 35

study rated media as their top informant on sexuality and romantic relationships (Huston et al., 1998). Similarly, a survey by Bachen and Illouz (1996) cited in Holmes (2007) discovered that ninety percent of youths look to movies for information about love, whereas ninety four percent gain this information from television. Just 33 percent and 17 percent of this population consult to their mothers and fathers respectively. Given these statistics, it is essential to research the similarities portrayed by media and those held by individuals about romance and relationships. Eggemont (2006) discovered that youths in undergraduate college are believed to have significant development functions after acquiring proper romantic skills and confidence in sexual activities.

Similarly, Ward (2003) and Brown et al., (2005) stated that a major source in the transfer of values and lifestyle and sexual information to young viewership is soap operas. Soap operas have a significant and powerful impact throughout the world. With their ability to inform, educate and entertain, soap operas shape our perception of the world (Moorosi, 2002). "The most essential learning from soap operas may lie in youth's perceptions of the nature of intimate human relationships" (Alexander, 1985:13). Moreover, it is hard to escape sexual content in the media. Youth are presented from primetime situation comedies to soap operas with numerous verbal and visual cues of how dating, intimacy, sex and relationships are handled (Strasburger & Donnerstein, 1999; Ward 2003). As argued by Cantor and Pingree (1983), the centre of the soap opera world is love, obligation, family and intimate relations. Soap operas present "a dream world" (Fine, 1981). Through television's representation, individuals are able to hold new ideas and one's creativity and imagination can be challenged and improved (Moorosi, 2002).

### **1.3 The Soap Opera**

Soap operas have been most common genre in media since the 1930s (Borchers, 1994). They started in the USA with various organisations such as, Palmolive, Proctor and Gamble creating an enthralled audience for product placements (Lavin, 1995). A genre that began as a small aspect of television broadcasting developed into one of the most-watched genres in current television broadcasting (Warth, 1994). A soap opera is talked over everywhere; inside a social, physical and individual environment. Viewers encounter this through elucidation, which is established in past encounters, landing at a relevant situation that affects their conduct. The

procedure through which this significance develops is the fundamental unit of investigation in this research. As a “dialogue-intensive” genre, soap operas have even been recognised as a valued asset in therapy, as they give rich substance from which to distinguish feelings, comprehend standards of relational connections, sentimental connections and foreseeing characters' activities (Creswell, 2001).

As stated by Bevan (2008), ever since the introduction of television in South Africa in 1976, many South Africans tuned in to see precisely what they had been missing for more than 20 years during which other parts of the world had access to television. After the opening night of television in South Africa, it quickly developed into a broadcasting service (Bevan, 2008). There are currently many South African-produced programmes which are shown across Africa and around the world. The study will particularly focus on four local soap operas which are played on weekdays on SABC (*Skeem Saam, Uzalo, Generations the Legacy and Muvhango*). There are several reasons for choosing these four soap operas. To begin with, there is certain prevalence of the genre with 76.7 percent of African population (SAARF, 2011). Geraghty (1996: 88) observed that “in the early 1990’s in Britain, the two programmes which repetitively competed for the first position in the ratings were both soap operas”. This is no different in South Africa where soap operas such as *Uzalo, Generations the Legacy, Skeem Saam* and *Muvhango* currently enjoy outstanding popularity. Another reason for the selection of soap operas in this study is their content. They clearly capture ordinary individuals and circumstances to which viewers can relate to (Strelitz, 2004).

Furthermore, audiences identify with soap operas due to their prolonged story lines. Lastly, the SABC target market is predominantly between the age of 16-34 and its brand is grounded in youthful, contemporary South African culture (SABC, 2012). This makes these selected soap operas a perfect fit for the demographic of the study.

## 1.4 Overview of Selected Soap Operas

### *i) Skeem Saam*

***Skeem Saam*** is a soap opera produced by Winnie Serite, aired on SABC1. It was first shown on SABC1 on Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2011, at 20h30. The first two seasons were aired as a weekly drama, but the show was later extended into a daily drama, beginning with Season 3. Season 3 was aired on Monday 14<sup>th</sup> July 2014 and shown at 18h30 daily. In the same year, on the 1<sup>st</sup> October, it shifted to being aired half an hour later (at 20h00), replacing *Generations*. *Skeem Saam* returned to its 18h30 timeslot in December 2014.

### *ii) Generations the Legacy*

***Generations*** first premiered on SABC1 in 1994. It was among the first soaps to premier in South Africa. It was produced by Mfundu Vundla and aired weekdays at 20h00. On 11 August 2014, the production of *Generations* halted because the cast were withholding their services. On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2014, the soap returned with new members and the new name of *Generations: The Legacy*. In the first week of its return, the soap was negatively reviewed by the public. Later on, the viewers warmed up to the renewed show.

### *iii) Uzalo*

*Uzalo* is a South African soap opera that was broadcast on SABC1 at 20:30 every week from Monday to Wednesday. It was later revised into a daily show. The show is set in Kwazulu-Natal's Kwamashu F-section. *Uzalo's* first show was in February 2015. The soap opera's use of local talent and set-up to express a realistic portrayal of life in the region makes it unique among other television shows.

### *iv) Muvhango*

***Muvhango*** is a South African television soap opera that was created, written and produced by Duma Ka-Ndlovu. It first premiered on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1997. At first, it was a Venda-language television drama, but later became multilingual to incorporate all languages and cultures of South Africa. This was intended to unite all people of South Africa.

Essentially, each of these soap operas put together a complex, but slow-moving, set of plot lines in which the lives of the characters are constantly interwoven. Although these four soap operas have different storylines, romantic relationships appear in all of them. This romantic element appears to be the most liked aspect of the soap operas by the youth. This study is unique in that there exists inadequate recent research on this topic and none to date on these four selected soap operas even though they are among the top five most watched programs according to the Television Audience Measurement Survey (TAMS) of 2016. The fifth program which is among the top five most watched shows on South Africa Television was excluded because it is a game show and hence does not fit into the study's focus area.

### **1.5 Soap Opera Viewership**

For millions of people worldwide, television and soap opera watching is a daily activity (Strelitz, 2004; Rios & Castaneda, 2011) and a popular culture phenomenon around the world (Keshishian & Mirakyan, 2017). Hill and Gauntlett (2002) emphasised that the majority of viewers watch television throughout their lives. Research has investigated the reasons for watching television and the relationships between television and soap opera viewing and various outlooks, characters and opinions (Tiggemann, 2005; Livingstone, 2013). This study will focus particularly on four soap operas which are aired on SABC, the viewership of which are: *Skeem Saam* -7 465 141 daily viewers, *Uzalo* 8 276 462 – daily viewers, *Generations: The legacy*-8 018 765 daily viewers and *Muvhango* -5 822 236 daily viewers (Television Audience Measurement Survey, 2016). The reason for the choice of these soap operas is that they attract massive numbers of viewers and are the most-watched soap operas on SABC (Television Audience Measurement Survey, 2016). They also express different ways of how relationships are handled which may encourage viewers to identify with their own relationships. The intention of selecting four soap operas instead of one is for comparison of cross-cultural representations of relationships by soap operas and their impact on undergraduate students' relationships.

Additionally, the justification for selecting these four soap operas from SABC as opposed to another genre, is the genre's capacity to endure faithful viewership for long durations. Since its establishment, the genre's ability to sustain faithful viewership has puzzled critics (Pitout, 1998). South African soap opera productions are examples of the commitment of

loyal viewership to these soap operas. Lastly, SABC was chosen from other television channels because it is a public broadcaster and hence the most watched. Its re-structured three channels ensures a broad representation of the various languages and cultural groups in South Africa (SABC, 2012). This fact was supported by the South African Reconciliation Barometer of 2017, which pointed out that the only public institution in which more than half of the population has confidence in is in the SABC (McMurrey, 2017). The channels deliver top-quality local and international content in all of South Africa's languages throughout the nation. SABC1, SABC2 and SABC3 attract on average 28 million South African viewers in a typical month (McMurrey, 2017). Marx (2008) added that upon reviewing the South African soap opera, it was clear that the soap opera genre is inclusive, transcultural and pulls in individuals from all societies. Likewise, it was stated that "Soap opera is commercial, but it is also a popular art form that has grown from the wellspring of culture and folk story and therefore appeals across time, cultures, and even classes" (Williams, 1992: 2).

## **1.6 Outline of Research Problem**

Researchers in both traditional mass communication and cultural studies were apprehensive about viewers' interpretations of television programmes (Livingstone, 2002, 2013). Studies of soap operas expose a world in which personalities are more likely to be involved in affairs than "everyday people". Whatsoever the purposes and reasons for this, it is clear to conclude that relationships are problematic (Worden, 2013). These relationship depictions are typical of soap operas. Primetime programmes feature action while soap operas focus on dialogue and the managing of interpersonal relationships. Soap operas are different from other genres in that they offer intervals for relationships to change and progress. It is this progression of intimate human relationships that is the basis of the serial genre. Relationships are all about intimate human relationships (Alexander, 1985). Therefore, it is essential for this research to look into the effect of these soap operas on college student's romantic relationships.

Many studies (Brown et al., 2006; Collins et al., 2011; Wright, 2011; Gamble & Nelson, 2016) interested into these progressions have recorded the developing youth's commencement in sexual activities. Youth's romantic expectations and beliefs about gender roles have turned into a point of research of late. However, there is inadequate information about how youth attempt to figure out what is imperative and expected in romantic relationships. That is, how

young people build ideas about romantic relationships, what influences their choice of partners and the role of each gender in romantic relationships.

Evidence shows that exposure to television can help youth learn about many aspects of their world (Dill & Thill 2007; Hurtz & Durkin, 2004 in Hefner & Wilson, 2013). Viewers can learn about families, careers and intimate relationships from media exposure. Researchers (Segrin & Nabi, 2002) have also tested whether sentimental media can develop relationship convictions among viewers. In a survey of 285 undergraduates, it was revealed that viewers of romantic-oriented television differ with light viewers of romantic-oriented relationships in that, light viewers<sup>2</sup> were more positively inclined to this statement: you must know each other's inner feelings (Segrin & Nabi, 2002). A study by Ferris et al., (2007) also focused on the exposure of undergraduate students to dating television programs and dating approval attitudes. Likewise, a survey of high school students revealed that heavy viewers of romantic relationships hold on to traditional dating role attitudes than light viewers. An example of this would be the belief that men are to be in charge of dates (Rivadeneira & Lebo, 2008).

Further findings on television programmes have been examined by scholars in South Africa such as Van der Merwe (2005) who looked at *Isidingo* as entertainment–education and Heintz-Knowles (1996) who did a content examination of sexual activity on daytime soap operas. Gendered roles, images and behavioural patterns in the soap opera *Generations* were investigated by Motsaathebe (2009) while Tager (2010) looked into 'The black and the beautiful: perceptions of a new Generation and Identification and interpretation: The Bold and the Beautiful and the urban black viewer in KwaZulu-Natal'. Likewise, studies on soap operas were also conducted by previous UKZN students such as Moorosi (2002) who investigated the representation of women on television. Thabethe (2008) on the other hand concentrated on the representation of black women's bodies in soap operas while Sehlabi (2012) looked into representations of homosexual men in soap operas. Pitout (1998) also wrote an article on reception analysis of different dimensions of soap opera viewing while Khan (1999) conducted a research titled 'Representations of women of colour in the soap

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<sup>2</sup> Light viewers are those who do not watch soap operas that often while heavy viewers are those that are committed to watching soap operas and seldom miss an episode.

*opera Egoli*". Although *Pitout* and Khan's studies are primarily audience-focused, the conclusion drawn on content and audience participation are instrumental. Flockeman, a South African author, also contributed to the understanding of South African viewers' reaction to soap operas (Flockeman, 2000).

Critical to this research is the idea that the effect of soap operas on youth's perception of intimate relationships raises several questions worth exploring. For example, there is an assumption by Ward (2003) that relationships are usually influenced or defined by media. This is therefore a good case study to examine and comprehend practices of soap operas and romantic relationships. Within a normative African context, parents would explain the expectations and requirements of sound relationships and gender roles to their children. African elders deem couple's mutual attraction as an imperfect sole choice for a relationship. Indeed, they are likely to take the view that a more detached judgement of the elders is more likely to select a partner with right qualities (Mair, 2013).

However, we have seen from the literature that with changing times and technology, the media had become the "parent" of the younger generation as a role model for sexual expectations and gender roles in their relationships (Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Gauntlett, 2008). It is of interest then in this study to enquire how soap operas have contributed to sexual expectations, gender roles and choices of partners in relationships in contrast to the traditional African model which identified the parents or elders as a model for sexual attitudes, gender roles and choosing partners for their children.

This research is concerned with exploring how a selected group of UKZN soap opera viewers living in undergraduate residences perceived the presentation of relationships and how this affected their own relationships and the extent to which (if at all) the viewers related to what the character in soap operas went through in their own lived relationships experience. Past researchers indicated that regardless of youths' dependence on the media for knowledge about relationships, not much has come to light on the extent to which they incorporate media messages into their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours and notions of masculinity and femininity (Buerkel-Rothfuss, 1993; Huston et al., 1998).

The preliminary literature study found that a fair amount of what has been composed on the genre has been expressive of its impacts on viewers. Further reading revealed that the

literature dealt with the informative viewer of soap operas (Livingstone, 1990; 1999), the growth of the soap opera genre (Liebes & Livingstone, 1998) and viewer representation of soap opera casts (Livingstone, 1989). Similarly, other studies have tried to layout the process of engagement with and interest of other TV genres. These include Busselle & Bilandic, (2008) who concentrated on the 'Fictionality and perceived realism in experiencing stories: a model of narrative comprehension and engagement'; Cohen (2001) on 'Defining identification: a theoretical look at the identification of audiences with media characters'; Green et al., (2004) on 'Understanding media enjoyment: the role of transportation into narrative worlds'; Hoorn and Konini (2003) on Perceiving and experiencing fictional characters: An integrative account. Konini and Hoorn (2005) researched on 'Some like it bad: testing a model for perceiving and experiencing fictional characters'. Further, Rubin (1985) and Perse (1986) also looked at college students and the effects of soap opera viewing. However, they were more fascinated by the viewing patterns of soap operas by university scholars and cultivation. Despite differences on the topics, what unites these researches is their understanding of the effects of soap operas on viewers. Therefore, undertaking this kind of investigation will contribute to our knowledge of what effects soap operas have on viewers' perceptions of gender roles and sexual expectations within relationships.

Some surveys such as Holmes (2007) have focused on the effect of choice of partners, but none of them used *Skeem Saam*, *Uzalo* and *Muvhango*. Furthermore, none of these studies used these four soap operas for comparison of cross-cultural representations of relationships by soap operas and their impact on undergraduate students' relationships. Since the soap opera's capacity to impact selections of partners, gender roles and sexual expectation is left mainly unexplored in educational literature, this research makes a valuable addition to research knowledge on soap operas and media theory and gender issues. It is therefore important to bring a new light, as media is constantly evolving. This study will add to the current literature on South African television soap operas.

### **1.7 Significance of the study**

Recognising the intense rootedness of media consumption in everyday life, the researcher was motivated by the popularity of soap operas amongst youths and how they can influence

their gender roles perspectives within their romantic relationships. Since my degree is interested in investigating the socially conditioned gendered behavior of men and women, the research sought it necessary to investigate the various influence soap operas have on people's lives. Furthermore, dating is an integral part of most undergraduates as they are curious to explore relationships, it is therefore significant to understand how soap operas impact them in this arena. This study will shed light into how media, especially popular soap operas can impact romantic relationships of South African youths as they are regarded to be the future of the country. It will further make us understand the capacity of soap operas to impact issues such as selection of partner, sexual expectations and how they shape young people's gender beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. It will finally offer valuable insights that will enable soap opera producers and writers to write and produce soap operas in a more meaningful ways.

## **1.8 Aim of the Study**

This study intends to critically analyse the degree to which UKZN undergraduate' students who watch one or all of the four soap operas adopt the content or portrayals of soap opera's intimate relationships into their own situations. This was carried out by exploring how university students make the link between their selection of romantic partners and what is being portrayed in soap operas, and the effects of gender role perspectives within their romantic relationships. The study further surveys the degree to which viewers relate to these shows compared to what has been written in previous literature. The study will scrutinize the interpretations made by respondents regarding particular soap operas and analyse respondents' understandings recorded by previous researchers on related studies.

### **1.8.1 Research Objectives**

The main research objective of the study was to investigate the influence of local soap operas on romantic relationships amongst UKZN students. Four specific research objectives were addressed in this regard:

1. To examine students' perceptions of soap operas with regard to romantic relationships.

2. To determine the influence of viewership on students' choices of relationship partners.
3. To investigate the extent to which the messages depicted by soap operas affect the gender roles in the students' relationships.
4. To determine the influence of the messages from soap operas on the student's sexual expectations in relationships.
5. To explore the contribution of soap operas on youths' romantic relationship choices against the traditional African model.

### **1.8.2 Research Questions: Key questions to be asked**

The central question in this research was to examine the effect of local soap operas on relationship aspects of UKZN students. The research questions are listed as follows:

“How do local television soap operas influence the attitude and behaviour pertaining to gender roles and sexual expectations in romantic relationships among UKZN students?”

Under this central question, the following key questions will be asked:

1. What are students' perceptions towards local television soap operas on romantic relationships?
2. How do these local television soap operas influence their choice of relationship partners?
3. How do messages portrayed in the local television soap operas influence the gender roles in their relationships?
4. How do these messages influence their sexual expectations in relationships?
5. How have soap operas contributed to sexual expectations, gender roles and choice of partners in relationships in contrast to the traditional African model?

### **1.9 Delimitation of the study**

This research focused on the effects of local soap operas on romantic relationship amongst University of KwaZulu-Natal undergraduate students. Limitations to the current study are based on procedural and practical technicalities. These are listed and discussed below.

Postgraduate students were omitted from this study due to the assumption that they were considered to be more experienced when it comes to dating than undergraduate students. The study was therefore limited to undergraduate students at UKZN Pietermaritzburg campus, who were in their first, second and third year of studies as well as residing in university residences. It was assumed that this category of students has just started dating and watches soap operas regularly and would have adequate experience of the influence of soap operas on romantic relationships. The study could not cover all UKZN campuses' undergraduate students due to time and cost constraints. Therefore, only a limited number of undergraduates in Pietermaritzburg campus were included in the study. With this in mind, the results from this research may not be generalized to the population of other students in other institutions.

The fact that the researcher was the chief collector and data analyser, and judgmental when it came to the selection of the participants, Merriam (2002) would argue that this was a shortcoming on its own with biases that might have impacted on the study. This was mitigated by applying general rules and ethics that govern research.

The timing of the data gathering for the research was not appropriate. The interviews were conducted between student protests and exams in 2016. It was not easy to conduct focus groups as a court ruling following student protests prohibited the gathering of any groups of more than five members at a time on campus. Further, it was not easy to access undergraduate residences as that was where the protests had been the worst. Immediately after the protests it was the examination period, and students were busy trying to make up for lost academic and revision time. Thus, as much as participants wanted to grant time for interviews and focus groups, they had to attend to extra classes and prepare for exams. As a result, some of the participants did not show up and those who could, did not stay for too long. Some questions and/or data were therefore compromised due to a scarcity of time with the participants. However, an effort was made during the interviews and focus groups to prioritize those questions which addressed the main focus of the study. The sample size was too small to make complete determinations from the data, thus conclusions were drawn cautiously. The sample was selected only from undergraduate students staying at the school

residences and the sample was therefore not inclusive of the total student population at UKZN.

## **1.10 Structure of the Thesis**

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter gives the introduction to the study, the background to the study, the statement of the research problem, key research questions and the structure of the thesis.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter provides a review of relevant literature as well as an introduction to the theoretical frameworks (reception theory and gender schema theory) which informed the study. The review examined previous scholars' work in the area of gender and television viewing in order to gain familiarity and contextualize the current study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology and Methods**

This chapter defines and justifies the qualitative research methodology used to answer the research questions. The chapter substantiates the use of qualitative research methods to collect data from participants and the reasons for sampling in terms of selecting participants. Population size as well as the sampling methods were also discussed in this chapter. It further demonstrates how data was be collected and analysed. Finally, ethical considerations were outlined.

### **Chapter 4: Perceptions**

This chapter discussed students' perceptions towards soap operas and their influence on romantic relationships.

### **Chapter 5: Gender Roles and Sexual Expectations**

This chapter discussed the influence of soap operas on students' gender roles and sexual expectations in relationships.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations**

In the final chapter, the broad results of the study are summarized with emphasis on the results obtained, the contribution made by the study, as well as recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the literature review, the history of soap operas in South Africa and the theoretical framework of this research. The chapter covers discussions surrounding soap operas and romantic relationships and arguments relating to viewers' perceptions. The research demonstrates how television shapes the attitudes and behaviours of its viewers, with specific emphasis on young people. It also attempted to understand the representation by and audience reception of various genres. Reviewing this literature is very important as it "enables the researcher to develop a clear understanding of the research topic, establish what has already been researched on the topic and identify gaps, which the researcher's own study can fill" (Nengomasha, 2009:51).

### **2.2 History of Soap Operas in South Africa**

Soap operas in audio format were introduced in South Africa in 1953. They were aired on SABC's Springbok Radio and their popularity amongst female listeners was frequently documented in annual SABC reports (Tomaselli et al., 1989). Soap operas were only introduced on television in South Africa in around 1984. Until 1993 all soap operas broadcast on the SABC were not produced locally. Nonetheless, South Africa's conversion programme post 1994 anticipated that the broadcasting industry needed to be transformed to adapt for all sectors of the population. This was due to the fact that it had been preserving all kinds of stereotypes including racial and gender stereotypes (Motsaathebe, 2009). As a result, a governing body- the Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) - was tasked with overseeing the modification and restructuring of the broadcasting industry in South Africa. At that time more than sixty per cent of shows on the SABC were developed overseas and had little or no relevance to the local population- particularly Blacks, Indians and Coloureds. The IBA suggested the prioritising of local programming (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995 in Motsaathebe, 2009). Once this decision had been made, the SABC proposed the establishment of three channels which would offer services in all eleven official languages in South Africa (Duncan & Glenn, 2010). Research indicated that the South African audience is self-divided into three market sections founded on language groupings. It was suggested that SABC 1 would deliver content

to the Nguni language group while SABC 2 would concentrate on the Sotho language group and SABC 3 English (Duncan & Glenn, 2010). Not long after this proposal had been adopted, the SABC shifted and re-launched its three television channels, trying to move them away from the separation of white and black audiences on different channels and to put emphasis on a nation- building role (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). As a result of the transformation imperatives, Mfundu Vundla, a veteran television producer, was approached to produce a soap opera for the SABC. This was to be “Generations” (Motsaathebe, 2009). As indicated in the SABC’s 1994 Annual Report, SABC chairperson Dr Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri specified that the SABC pledged to boost South African drama productions (SABC Annual Report, 1994). In addition, the SABC’s strategy was to add local content programming to match the interests and demand of much of the South African population (Teer-Tomaselli, 1995). The SABC realised that local content was extremely popular with South African audiences.

The SABC therefore continued to incorporate more local productions such as *Suburban Bliss*, 1998, which led the audience increase index in 1998 (Teer-Tomaselli, 2001). The Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA), which superseded the IBA after the union with the South African Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (SATRA), also began to realise the commercial potential success of South African content. It maintained that television programmes ought to be mainly South African. It stated that all channels had to be supervised in order to guarantee that they were mostly South African- dominated (Duncan & Glenn, 2010). Consequently, many exciting programmes had been and are still being produced. For instance, a local drama known as, <sup>3</sup>*Soul City* in 1994, <sup>4</sup>*Yizo* which was first aired in 1999 with a sequel produced and played in 2002 and contributed to building a demand for South African drama. The SABC has also commissioned long-running local

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<sup>3</sup> Soul city is an educational drama produced to try to address the harsh realities that many students faced in schools, such as sexual harassment, drug and alcohol addiction and lack of educational resources (Duncan & Glenn, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Yizo Yizo deals a series of social problems, as well as the relations ostensibly at play within township schools. It treated the problem of violence in the townships in an overt and gritty manner (Modisana, 2010)

programmes that maintain high audience ratings, such as *Muvhango* in 1997, *Skeem Saam* was later produced in 2011 and *Uzalo* in 2015, contributing greatly to the SABC's ability to meet its side-lined languages quota. There are many other locally-produced soap operas, however the current study's interest lies in these four. The SABC's now well-established formula comprises the localisation of the soap genre, built on the normalisation of middle-class lifestyles (Duncan & Glenn, 2010). There has been great competition between locally-produced soap operas to date. This study investigates the effects of the watching experiences of local soap operas by college students on their romantic relationships. As argued by Keshishian and Mirakyan, (2017) they are the young generation and are considered the future of the country.

### **2.3 The Role of Television in Shaping Beliefs and Attitudes of Viewers**

The impact of television on viewers' attitudes and beliefs has been discussed by researchers since the arrival of television. Hernandez (2012) discovered that research by different authors showed that television is a socially-transformative tool due to its capacity to guide culture and social perception and to unite groups of people through message broadcasting (Jackson *et al.*, 2008; Rice, 2009; Collins, 2010). Some researchers such as Gerbner and Gross, (1976); Gerbner *et al.*, (2002); Morgan & Shanahan, (1996) and Hetsroni, (2010) have confidence in the fact that television does influence viewers. For example, a theory of television effects named cultivation was developed by Gerbner and his associates (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner *et al.*, 2002; Morgan & Shanahan, 1996; Hetsroni, 2010). They suggested that cultivation came about when viewers regularly watched television and integrated the material they watched into their real-world perceptions and judgments. They further claimed to support the theory of cultivation by presenting that light viewers have less real-world perceptions and beliefs that correspond to the world than heavy viewers (Gerbner *et al.*, 2002). In support of this concept, studies have shown regular viewing of television relates positively with perceptions of things aired intensely on television (Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Ultimately, specific messages shared by media shape mentalities and curve convictions about reality and result in the cultivation process (Hetsroni, 2010). Gagnon and Simon (2005) also indicated that both cultivation and social cognitive theories claim that exposure to television can contribute to developing young people's perception of accurate social norms guiding

sexual relationship and to the understanding of their peers' relational attitudes and expectations.

Other researchers have, on the other hand, questioned the validity of this cultivation effect, as does this study. Chock (2011) for instance argues that the relationship between media exposure and an individual's own attitudes and behaviour is rather complex. A researcher Brown (2013) feels that judgements regarding deeply-represented constructs are more the result of direct experience, education, character, free time to watch television than television watching consistency. Whereas Zillmann (1980) maintained the causal connection is reversed. In line with these concerns, Shrum (1995) added that the trustworthiness of the cultivation influence may be the result of the kind of conclusions that individuals create.

Fujioka (1999) stated that television is considered to be a very significant source of data that assumes a part in developing viewers' social reality. Mutz and Nir (2010) pointed out that in the case where television is viewed for a long period, the symbolic environment that is produced by media will likely cultivate a perception that suggests the world is how media portrays it. For this reason, a lot of young people are perhaps more vulnerable because of the messages from media on dating relationships and sex and the lack of other sources of information on such experiences (Potter, 1986; Evra, 2004). There are limited portrayals of messages about dating and relationships on television (Kunkal, et al., 2003).

Research by Rivadeneyra and Lebo, (2008) indicated that youth are certainly susceptible to the relationship and gender roles messages portrayed on television and soap operas. Chock (2011) however maintained that the connection between exposure to television and shaping behaviours, attitude and expectations is very complicated. One reason for differences in effects may be that media content influences perceptions of others differently than it does to perceptions of self (Chock, 2011). The discrepancy of the impact of exposure to media predicts that identification is an essential factor in personal-level effect but is not so important in modelling social level effects. Perceived realism may, therefore, be of less importance in facilitating the relationship between exposure and social-level assessments of others, than in influencing individuals' identification with media content, which could determine the extent of media influence on a personal level (Chock, 2011). "Perceived realism

could contribute to identification by increasing or reinforcing perceived similarities between individual's own attitudes and behaviours and the more media like attitudes and behaviours of others." (Chock, 2011:359).

It therefore, does not come as a surprise that some authors such as Rahman (2013) stated that, as a genre of mass media, romantic media has the potential to influence and shape audiences' views. Galician (2004), a critical analyst of romantic media, revealed in his study that people search for romantic content in the media that focus on relationships that seem to work irrespective of all challenges. In short, Galician (2004) reserves the notion that romantic media provides viewers with a sense of positivism about love because it creates examples of relationships that endure difficulties. It is likely that viewers seek out sentimental substance in media for similar reasons (Hefner, 2011).

Furthermore, most scholars propose that television portrayals also have the capacity to convey influential sensitive reactions from its viewers (Morella 1998; Coleman & Denis-Wu 2010 in Matlala, 2014). According to Matlala (2014) the exciting content within some television programmes could be viewed as a method of addressing the desires of television audiences. Emotion is demanded by viewers (Gorton, 2009). These emotions incite engagements in viewers that can lead to transformation, and can promote discussion (Matlala, 2014). For example, an episode of any of these four selected soap operas (*Skeem Saam, Generations: The legacy, Uzalo and Muvhango*) brings about substantial discussion among viewers in both private and public places, such as at schools / university residences or within a family at home.

It has been suggested that the approval of television content may be affected by viewers' perceived reality about television messages. Overall, viewers are mostly influenced by television when they perceive the content as an accurate depiction of actual life (Mutz & Nir, 2010). For instance, according to Fujioka (1999) individuals with low perceived reality were less likely to embrace a television reality as compared to individuals with a high level of perceived reality. Certain features that make the difference between reality and fiction more problematic are: a lack of cognitive skills, direct experience and certain personality features, such as loneliness. Overall, those people who are regarded as being more vulnerable to television messages are youths, immigrants and foreign audiences due to their insufficient

skills in evaluating mediated information, or motivational factors such as information seeking. (Fujioka, 1999).

According to Lull (1988) family members often make up a television audience; it does not just happen. "Viewers not only make their own interpretations of shows, they also construct the situations in which viewing takes place and the ways in which acts of viewing, and program content, are put to use. It is through talk about television that the audience is constituted in certain ways" (Lull, 1988:17). The level of viewer fulfilment is determined by the capacity of the different media sources to address their needs (Livingstone, 1991).

### **2.3.1 Representation and Audience Reception of Various Genres**

Representation alludes to the development in any medium, including the media, of features of reality. These could be individuals, places, things, occasions, social personalities and other non-concrete notions (Manovich, 2001; Chandler, 2006). According to Hall (1997) representation is a critical part of the process by which meaning is created and shared between individuals from a particular culture. At its centre, this study stresses on the representation of romantic relationships in soap operas and the reception of those representations by the genres. The contracts of genre in television research shows how the reader places him/herself in relation to the genre, the sorts of conclusions he or she makes about the genre and the nature and the extent to which the reader becomes involved in the genre (Allen, 1992; Livingstone, 2004). A few examinations have inspected the sorts of sentimental connections depicted on TV and the impacts of those on the survey populace (Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Osborn, 2012; Signorielli, 1991 in Anderegg, 2013). Research indicates that appearances of romantic relationships on television frequently generate inconsistent depictions (Galician, 2004; Johnson & Holmes, 2009). For example, situation comedies often depict sentimental connections as cheerful and fulfilled, while dramatizations appear to centre around negative perspectives, including separation and infidelity (Signorielli, 1991). On the other hand, soap operas portray romantic relationships as developing and changing.

Nonetheless, on account of the conflicting depictions exhibited on TV, youngsters addressed whether the romanticized depictions were exact portrayals of the real world (Anderegg, 2013). Furthermore, understanding if and how audiences perceive these depictions may help

in understanding interpersonal use of the behaviours shown on television (Anderegg, 2013). Viewers' understandings of TV programmes ought to mediate the impacts of viewing. These translations result from the beneficial use of ordinary social learning in an organised content. They accordingly rely upon the relative intensity of comprehensions and programmes to choose the idea of the interpretations. Zillmann and Bryant (1985), cited in Brown (2002) state that individuals within a crowd of people will not expect or translate such messages in the same way.

The social cognitive perspective states that audience members create messages they get from TV watching, knowledge associated with past understanding and viewer participation (Bandura, 2001). This personal participation and experience impacts the manner in which viewers associate with the images aired on television and consequently, the type of impact these images may contain. Tager (1997) and Strelitz (2004), through their study on viewers' consumption and receiving of media, have substantiated that the diverse age groups of viewers explore and relate to media messages contrarily. Moreover, according to Strelitz (2004) situations can likewise be extremely persuasive in how viewers consume media. Viewers not only make their own interpretations of shows, but are likely to build the circumstances in which viewing takes place and the manner in which the influence of viewing and programme content are put to practice. Viewers each take from their viewing experiences what they need, within the limits of each type of media source to fulfil their expectations (Palmgreen et al, 1985).

It was also discovered that the level of involvement in a viewing experiences is correlated with apparent worthiness of information (Chory, 2013). This perceived worthiness impacts on individuals' responses to media messages (Sherif et al, 1965 in Rubin & Perse, 1987). An example of this is when individuals are faced with messages about relevant subjects, they are more likely to focus on enlightening message components and better process them (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Krugman (1966) defined the significance of inclusion as an immediate individual experience whilst receiving messages. As reflected in relational, political and mass correspondence research, the level of viewer's attachment is associated to participation. When individuals are included, they centre their focus on the message (Bailyn, 1959) and respond sensitively (Capella, 1983). That is, involved viewers at home focus on and consider the message, become involved with the action-drama or soap opera (Bryant & Comisky, 1978)

and then can relate to television actors (Worden, 2013). Involvement is seen as behavioural involvement as a result of media coverage. Viewers' inclusion incorporates prosocial cooperation with TV casts and the consideration and examination of media messages. For instance, after every episode viewers usually discuss what has just unfolded on the show with fellow viewers.

Livingstone (1991), Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi (2013) discussed the significance of television in our everyday lives. They differ on most or all of the main dimensions of audience analysis. For instance, these authors differ in their notions of whether the audience is passive or active, vulnerable or resilient, the processes of a programme's effects on viewers, the nature of effects, the level of effects and the appropriate methods for study thereof (Livingstone, 1991). Additionally, past investigations demonstrated that soap operas are conveyed on screen through the depiction of personalities and storylines (Livingstone, 1998). He estimated that positive viewing experiences would prompt devotion to soap operas and the ability to relate to their depictions (Livingstone, 1998). For example, the results from a survey of college students revealed that being exposed to sexually-oriented television was associated with the male students expecting a wide range of sexual activities in relationships, while female expectations were that sex would occur early on in relationships. All these expectations were the result of exposure from the sexual content on television. Similarly, the act of watching TV to obtain motive anticipated a probability of a range of sexual activities to occur in a relationship for males (Aubrey et al., 2003).

### **2.3.2 Situation Comedies**

Situation comedy is a genre of comedy where characters who share public environments such as a homes or workplaces, have humorous interactions. Situation comedies began on radio, but currently have television as their main media source. Mockumentaries can also take this form. Depending on the programme's production setup, a situation comedy television programme may be filmed in front of a studio audience. A laugh track is used to imitate or enhance the effect of a live studio audience.

Unlike other media, entertainment situation comedies offer acquaintance and continuous emotional participation with characters which results in greater accessibility to various themes, values and information (Pearl & Pearl, 1999). The evidence of the acceptance of

sexual stereotypes is positively predicted by the exposure to prime-time television fare such as sitcoms and dramas (Ward, 2002; Ward & Friedman, 2006). In addition, studies have shown that television viewing is related with sexual convictions and desires (Eggermont, 2004; Haferkamp, 1999; Ward, 2002). Other surveys deduce that young females and males inversely translate media content. For instance, the study of college students by Ward and her associates showed how college students interpreted situation comedies. Their study revealed that men are less likely to think sexual episodes are realistic than women are. They further found that men are less believing of portrayed behaviours that are relationship-maintaining than women are. For example, an envious husband defending his wife and being accepting of threats such as infidelity in a relationship (Ward et al., 2001).

### **2.3.3 Romantic Comedies/ Film**

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, romantic comedies became common genres with the growing popularity of cinemas. Young people preferred to watch romantic movies over other genres in the late 1930s (Edman, 1940). Romantic comedies are often regarded as organised stories boosting unrealities about love. They deal with vivid struggles crucial to the human experience (Grindon, 2011). A 2008 poll by an American film institution explained romantic comedy as a genre in which the progression of romance points to a comic state. Billy Mermit also debated that romance must be the main narrative component. While film researchers explain romantic comedy as “a process of orientation, conventions and expectations” (Neale & Krutnik, 1990:136-49).

Stories of sentiment in the media frequently centre on the lack of enough potential partners. Rivalry over potential romantic partners is a common theme in romantic comedies. An audit of classic romantic comedies yields numerous cases of movies in which various ladies pursue an unmarried man (Shankman, 2001; Fletcher, 2008 in Jenkins, 2013). In different movies of the genre, numerous men go after the attention and affection of an unmarried woman, or a lady must pick among different romantic choices (Turteltaub, 1995; Reiner, 1989). Such "love triangles" are also public components of many soap opera plots. Given the impact of diversion media content on sexual behaviour, it is worth considering whether such portrayals may influence the attributes that both gentlemen and ladies look for in imminent sentimental or sexual accomplices in light of partner abundance or shortage.

### 2.3.4 Soap Operas

A soap opera is a serial show on TV or radio that highlights related story lines revolving around the lives of various characters. The stories in these episodes ordinarily centre intensely around passionate connections, to the point of melodrama (Okinyi et al, 2014). The soap opera has remarkable genre conventions. Firstly, it is an endless serial show that is aired every day. Secondly it has no hero or heroine and does not focus on a single character, but rather has a participatory association between a network of characters. Thirdly, soap operas incorporate a range of accounts, which join different stories that are never totally concluded (De Kock, 2010). Soap operas could be viewed as a consistent centre with no assurance of a specific end or determination (Livingstone, 1998; Pitout, 1998; Warth, 1994). Fourthly, soap operas have different quick divisions between storylines in a single scene. The minute viewers fixate on the characters and circumstances of one storyline, the soap proceeds onward to another storyline. This divisions happens a few times in a scene (Pitout, 1998). Fifth, an attempt is made to match the calendar time in the film to the calendar time in reality (Pitout, 1998).

The sixth feature is that the soap opera addresses socially-important subjects which include relationships, relatives, reproduction, sexual orientation and the role of society therein (Hobson, 1994). Seventh, actors serve as representatives of opposing views and the account plays out as these disparate positions are arranged, controlled and adjusted. The theme of the soap opera is regular day-to-day existence, depicted through the lives of actors and it is as a result of this characteristic that the viewer is dependably in a better position than that of the producer (Hobson, 1994; Pitout, 1998). Eighth, the soap opera has storyline subjects that recur. Examples of such subjects are sentiment, the single parent and loss. Ninth, soap operas have character categories that recur, for example, the youthful, the sentimental heroine, the sentimental hero, the mother and the father (Pitout, 1998). Lastly, soap operas are a dialogue-heavy genre (Self, 1984; Mumford, 1995).

Hoekstra (2000) specified that soap operas have been found to significantly affect viewers' social patterns and certain aspects of adult personality development. The impacts of visual stimuli, regardless of whether experienced in the motion picture screens, soap opera or other genres of television, have an unbelievable effect on individuals. This effect is not generally clear to the consumer of the media, however it has been identified and has additionally been

the subject of numerous investigations. The vast majority of the examinations accessible on soap operas point to the effect the soap opera shows have on viewers' lives (Ex et al., 2002; Segrin & Nabi, 2002; Wyer & Adaval, 2004).

Soap operas share the concept of immediacy with real life. We use the social cognition associated with regular day-to-day existence to decipher soap operas. For instance, Wyer and Adaval (2004) proposed that subconscious ideas and learning from television coverage can influence the understanding of new information and suggestions. Similarly, O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) found that dedicated soap opera viewers have fundamentally-higher simplicity of recovery of ideas in memory from watching soap opera and afterward utilize these by methods of heuristics (mental shortcuts) in their interpretation of the real world. Information that viewers are presented with whilst watching soap operas can impact judgements and choices viewers make in real life (Shrum, 1996). As Gagnon and Simon (2011) pointed when discussing scripting theory, messages that are considered to be precise will be easier to incorporate into individual's sexual scripts because they do not go against people's existing sexual scripts. Busselle and Bilandzic (2008) argued that perceived realism may also work in the opposite direction by inspiring criticism of the narrative, which may then interfere with learning.

Soap operas advance into the lives of viewers in a way that surpasses the thirty minutes of their time night after night on a weekly basis. Soap operas depict regular daily experiences and occasions, and since these are so recognisable and pertinent, they are talked over among companions as though discussing shared associates (Giles, 2002; Pitout, 1998). Tager (1997) also discovered that viewers' interpreted soap operas during and also after an episode was broadcast through the discussion of the soap with other viewers. This is not any different from the participants of the current study.

Most viewers at home inversely translate TV messages and are likewise inversely influenced by feelings and issues. This addresses utilisers of media and demonstrates that viewers effectively decrypt media messages (Hall 1973). Similarly, Hall (1973) suggests that media messages are polysomic. This prompts the argument of how viewers are impacted and interpret emotions in television programmes. It can be contended that viewers are pulled in

to emotive TV, as the feelings depicted appear to be valid and thus they can relate to the issues portrayed. A significant part of the delight of watching soaps was recognised as being the capacity to talk about the soap with different people.

While numerous soap operas reference reality, they also veer away from genuine life situations. It is a direct result of this that soap operas could be viewed as a source of soft news (Kitzing & Henderson, 2001). The possibility that soap opera viewers discuss them with kindred viewers has positive ramifications (Kitzing and Henderson, 2001). It enables viewers to investigate the narratives of the actors, while allowing them to test perspectives on social standards, which are difficult to talk about on a conceptual level for actual circumstances (Riegel, 1996).

#### **2.4 Soap operas, the Youth and Romantic Relationships**

Millions of people view television and soap operas daily (Haferkamp, 1999; McMurrey, 2017). Women between the ages of fifteen upwards make up the bulk viewers of soap operas (SAARF, 2011). A soap opera can be defined as “a continuing fictional dramatic television program, presented in multiple serial instalments each week, through a narrative composed of interlocking storylines that focus on the relationships within a specific community of characters” (Mumford 1995: 18). Media is one of the most important aspect of young peoples’ lives that may take on superior significance during youth, and mostly for romantic relationships conducts. A dominant developmental task throughout this stage (Arnett, 2000) is beginning to engage in sexual relationships. Ward (2002:1) says, “From first loves to Spring Break “hook-ups,” youth must learn to negotiate the dynamics of the dating arena, making a number of complex decisions concerning the selection of partners, initiation of sexual activities, and protection against pregnancy and disease”. In this manner, the effect of watching soap operas on impressions of intimate connections is relevant in light of the fact that soap operas depict connection issues and struggles. Different to week-by-week circumstance comedies and primetime shows, connections on soap operas are created by regular routine, over significant durations of time- similar to genuine relationships (Alexander, 1985).

Similarly, Brown (2002) showed that the broad communication is an inexorably accessible route for young people to find out about connections. Through its discourse, characterisation, story lines and subjects, TV programmes give young people various verbal and visual examples of how dating, closeness, connections and sex are dealt with. Basten (2009) agreed that soap operas, or *telenovelas* in Latin and South America, can either explicitly, or implicitly, convey a specific theme which can possibly influence viewers' behaviour. For instance, youth watching sexualized media can be influenced to be more eager to commence dating. As indicated by Bielby and Harrington (2005), contemporary U.S soap operas have evolved remarkably since their initial days to commend heterosexual romance, marriage, and family life. Soaps' association with sentimental coupling, decoupling and re-coupling has rendered them impervious to portrayals of "otherness" of any sort, regardless of whether this is racial, ethnic, sexual or religious. Rouner (1990) also maintained that youths found proper gender role and sexual media inclusion, which corresponded to their gender preferences. Research utilisation of media by the youth, suggests that youth look to media messages for information about social role conducts, values and convictions (Rouner, 1990; Rouner et al, 2003). In this way, interpretation of TV depictions may contrast amongst men and women, in light of various needs and interests as indicated by life stages.

## **2.5 South African Soap Operas and the Context of the Study**

This thesis argues that soap operas, in the same way as other different types of famous media, assume a part in organising and positioning individuals' daily existence schedules. The thesis investigates the ways in which South African soap operas serve as a gauge and a vehicle of consistency and transformation in contemporary South Africa. De Kock (2010) indicated that soap operas are typically marked as a female genre. However, the range and consequent effect of the class ought not to be constrained to the female viewers (Frisby, 2002). Frisby (2002) examined the role of soap operas on male viewers and found that their viewership was motivated by the fact that it makes them feel good, provides an escape and helps discussions with the opposite sex.

De Jager (2004) conducted research on the popularity of soap operas amongst children. This, along with statistics for grown-up male viewers (Frisby, 2002) is evidence of the current

broadened reach of the genre. It is important to find out how viewers react to soap operas. As Livingstone (1998) contended, characters are thought to intervene or cause the vast majority of the impact of soap opera on viewers through empathy, role modelling and parasocial relations. Consistent viewers become comfortable with characters and feel included and intrigued by them. Like many other television genres, South African soap operas provide viewers with sources of enthusiastic commitment which provide them, for better or for worse, with new understandings, pictures and solid directions for suggested social and individual behaviours. More than four million South Africans watch *Generations: The legacy*, *Skeem Saam*, *Uzalo* and *Muvhango*, the most of whom are young black viewers aged between 15 and 35 years of age (SAARF 2007). It has been contended that the way of life examples, language and products related with soap operas result in the breakdown of native social practices and assorted customs. In the South African field, the SABC exposes viewers to an abundance of imported American soap operas blended with locally-produced soap operas (De Kock, 2010).

What individuals watch on television does not lapse when the moment of reception passes. The implications accumulated from TV are persisted into a person's regular daily existence and different methods of action and connection (Livingstone 2004). Soap operas are all about intimate human relationships. Soap opera relationships are formed, prosper and end. Fine described them as portraying "a dream world, men and women with intimate attachments to each other, who talk about intimate topics, and reveal their private feelings in intimate conversational style. The soap opera generates a warm, bounded society in which the partakers receive recurrent sustenance from each other" (Fine, 1981:106). Communication is a tactic that is craftily adapted in soap operas to infuse uncertainty, fear or mistrust. Communication is also used to restore and to resolve conflicts. Thus, if a youthful audience learns that relationships are delicate and observes how communication maintains relationships, they are likely to do the same to maintain their own relationships.

The media, be that as it may, does not influence all young people in a similar way. Research on young soap opera audiences shows that an essential mediator of influence is inspiration for watching (Rubin, 1985). Rubin (1985) proposed that intentions for viewing may separate

viewers for comparative substance and, consequently, mass correspondence impact (Rubin, 1984, 1985). Rubin (1985) discovered motives for soap opera viewing amongst university students to be interrelated structures differential linkages to audience activity. Other researchers such as Carveth and Alexander (1985) also discovered a complicated collation between types of rationale and serial impact. For instance, university-age serial viewers whose main inspiration for watching was amusement were more common than professionals such as doctors and legal advisors and personal issues is society (Carveth and Alexander, 1985). However, Rouner (1982) found that sensitive soap opera viewers were more likely to relate to a "mean world" than were less invested viewers.

As illustrated in the literature review, studies on soap opera viewing had been conducted before, however, the question of whether they have any effect on gender roles, sexual expectation and on a choice of a partner amongst undergraduate students' relationships is still unclear. The significance of this study is to inform readers to what extent (if at all) these portrayals incorporate in students' actual relationships. The outcome of the study will add towards the body of knowledge in the area of gender issues and television viewing from the perspective of university students.

## **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

In mass communication theory, viewers, together with creation and content have been spoken to throughout the years in one of the broad hypothetical standards: encoding and decoding (Livingstone, 2006). These standards represent conflicting views on how the television audience should be conceptualised from the populist view on the one hand, (which regards the audience as assorted and dynamic), to the elitist view that regards the audience as a homogenous, careless mass (Biocca, 1988; Livingstone, 1991, 1998).

While many researchers (Allen, 1992; Biocca, 1988; Livingstone, 1999) concurred that TV has a necessary influence on peoples' day-to-day lives, they differ on all the significant measurements of viewers' analysis. For example, the viewers as inactive or dynamic, the programme as open to different translations or as a set message for all, the procedure through which TV influences the viewers through their choice or an imposition, the nature of

the consequences for conduct or convictions, the level that impacts individuals, social or political, and ultimately, the techniques through which to research viewers and the writings they associate with such as ethnography, experiment, text analysis (Allen, 1992; Biocca, 1988; Livingstone, 1999). According to Livingstone (1991) people must evade over universalisation and rather acknowledge the arranging role of the text. They should do this whilst permitting the positive role of the viewer to convey meaning. This thesis aims to comprehend how viewers deduce and build relationships with television in generally, and specifically with soap operas.

In line with the above-mentioned concerns, the current study is grounded by both gender schema theory and reception analysis theory. These theories have been used to take a close look at television programmes and how they contribute to the intimate relationships of university students and how audiences relate to these programmes. These theories were valuable in unpacking issues that exist inside the content of how audiences create meaning. These are reasonable theories to use in comprehending issues of audience independence Strelitz (2004).

### **2.6.1 Reception Theory**

The study of understanding and interpretation must continuously be positioned within historical traditions because people's history plays a significant part in the manner in which they understand messages (Thompson, 1990). Understanding how audiences make meaning of a specific media text is referred to as reception theory (Branston & Stafford, 1999). Reception analysis highlights that viewers are dynamic and can connect fundamentally with specific content and draw from this their own particular significance - either unique or alike. These connections and deductions can be different to what the creators of the content envisioned would take place. That is, it holds that human beings are not "blank slates" who just observe something and take as it is. Reception theory centres on the viewers' dynamic processing or grappling with the meaning of TV programmes, where these are progressively examined inside their daily setting (Gray, 1999). In the present study, viewers of four selected soap operas gave their own interpretations of the relationships portrayed on television and how they affected them.

Reception theory acknowledges the power that crowds have in connection to media writings, and therefore, restrict the media influences that suggest that viewers are dormant users of the media (Branston & Stafford 1999). Hence, reception analysis theory was the lens through which the researcher unpacked how students interpreted information encoded in the selected soap operas. Viewers are a source of wealth in the interpretive procedure. Their connection with a script is situated against a foundation of desires, recollections, interests, information, experience and understandings. Since the vast majority of the writing on media is composed by media researchers who are more concerned with the text while they disregard the reader as a useful instrument (De Kock, 2010).

There is, nonetheless, a theoretical approach from each field that could be valuable in understanding both the organizing part of the content and the interpretive part of the viewer. These methods are reception theory from media studies and sexual orientation theory from sex surveys. Reception theory views the definition of content (or TV programmes) as something that is created through reading or watching, as opposed to something that is impartially intrinsic to the content (Allen, 1992). Reception theory stresses clarification and acceptance of historicity. This is the idea that understanding is assured by foundation information or the individual's social foundation and reliance. The translation is reliant on the social and settings of the viewer (De Kock, 2010).

### 2.6.2 The Ingenious Viewer

Researchers Liebes and Katz (1989) trusted that the position of the viewer has been progressed during the development of communications studies. Hobson (1994:167) stated that, "the process of television communication is recognised as not being complete until it is perceived and understood by the viewer". Clearly, the viewer is viewed as a basic part of the meaning creation process. Media research identifies the viewer as prepared for his/her interpretive part, with a fortune resources (De Kock, 2010). A shared conversation on the interpretation of actors has proven these resources. Actors are depicted in stories to represent the assortment of identity characteristics, all of which need to be discussed by viewers through connecting with other actors (De Kock, 2010). This deduction is fundamental for the development of the story, since the actors represent different account subjects. Actors frequent generalization about sexual orientation, profession and qualities to facilitate the

understanding procedure and legitimize the utilization of the viewer's social learning (Livingstone, 1998). The rationale of an actor's identity is not made by the content alone, yet relies upon the viewers' understanding. This verifies that their understanding of a character is on a par with their awareness of different people and actors in a soap. It is inside the setting of past translations that a viewer can develop a sound model of how to comprehend any fresh information (Livingstone, 1998 in De Kock, 2010).

### 2.6.3 The Soap Opera as Open Text

Rogge (1994) cited in De Kock pointed out that “television is interpreted against the background of existing opinions and knowledge about social life and what is known about the genre” De Kock (2010:24). Reception theory on the other hand debates that the reader cannot be detached from the definition of the text (De Kock, 2010). Eco (1979) cited in De Kock (2010) stated that interpretation is socially-set and related this to semiotic principles of coding and decoding. Eco (1979) maintained that the variation of codes and sub-codes bound in a message, the socio-cultural conditions of the user, and the initiative the reader takes link into a message that is multiple and exclusive to all users. A reader is not solely independent of the message but rather makes interpretations of all contents which can be intrinsic to the reader or reinforced by the content through techniques. Examples of these techniques are classification, translation and cliché coding (De Kock, 2010).

Hidden content attempts to take the viewer on a pre-arranged route and subtly arouses feelings to ensure that expectations match what will be fulfilled by acted play (De Kock, 2010). Open content, then again, boosts an assortment of disparate understandings, reliant upon the point of view of the user. It deliberately stresses various potential translations by equating them, and in doing so, results in incongruity and difference (De Kock, 2010). Due to the variety of characters and succeeding stances depicted, Livingstone (1998) in De Knock (2010) proposed that the soap opera is an open text. Contrary to action-adventure dramas and motion pictures, the viewer does not relate to one character and wholly trail after that character's point of view of. It rather allows the viewer to relate to a range of characters which leads to diverse points of view on a variety of issues (Livingstone, 1998). Participants have the chance to choose which relationships they identify with or which relationships portray their experience and expectations.

Livingstone stated that, “empirical reception research offers an integrating, convergent approach to the television audience” (Livingstone, 1991:3). This method centres on the viewers' engaged understanding or meaning created out of television shows, where these are slowly analysed within their daily scenery (Livingstone, 1991). “Empirical reception research regards viewers' interpretations as primary, seeking to relate these to ethnographic and to effects-related concerns at a later stage. The omission of interpretative issues is seen to have impoverished other approaches to the audience, and yet the study of such issues itself raises numerous problems”, Livingstone (1991:3). Reception analysis theory will be the lens through which the researcher understands how students interpret the information encoded in the selected soap operas. This theory is particularly significant to this study in that soap opera viewers are sometimes considered as empty slates who just accept whatever is being portrayed on television.

#### **2.6.4 Gender Schema Theory**

Gender schema theory suggests that by the age of 5 children have gathered information on gender role norms (Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Ruble et al, 1998 in Phohlo, 2011). With age, knowledge regarding gender develops and stretches out into new spaces as young people mature and begin to have sexual associations (Hill & Lynch, 1983; Huston & Alvarez, 1990). Gender schema theory proposes that the phenomenon of sex typing begins, to some degree, from sexual orientation-based schematic handling. This entails the ability to process information on the basis of the sex-linked associations that constitute the gender schema (Bem, 1981).

Though content for sexual orientation patterns is drawn from numerous sources and encounters, probable influencers are broad communications and specifically television. With its engaging pictures and dynamic actor depictions, television provides different examples of the masculine or feminine (Bem, 1987). As with reception theory, gender schema theory sees the viewer as energetic and independent in making sense of the world (and media). This is as opposed to merely being receptive to surrounding activities, internal powers or implications passed on by social interpretations of femaleness and maleness (De Kock, 2010). A central aspect of social development is society's understanding of the definitions of masculinity and femininity. Perle & Waguespack (2011) defined a schema as a cognitive organisation, a linkage

of associations that arranges and directs an individual's perception. It follows that gender schema theory would be the platform with which the study would expose the varied perceptions and responses that affect the students' behaviours (Perle & Waguespack, 2011).

Gender schema organises our insights about sex and guides how new sexual orientation data and encounters are understood and handled. Moreover, young people spend more time watching soap operas every weekday evening (for, on average, about five hours at a time) than they do talking directly to their parents (Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). The portrayals that television offers can be imperfect. Examinations show that in the main, television portrayals develop rather narrow perspectives of the genders – often depicting ladies as sexual objects, parental figures, or subordinates while men are depicted as pioneers, aggressors and providers (Arnett, 2002; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Ward, 1995). Since encoding each clichéd portrayal includes significant gender schemas, media presentation can assume a basic part both in moulding schema content and in advancing endless availability. They may likewise bolster impressions of gender roles that are constrained and potentially dangerous for youngsters.

Gender schema theory contends that individuals learn through socialization in their daily lives and in social talk and a diverse handling of similar messages occurs (Lingle & Ostrom, 1979 in Rouner et al., 2003). The gender schema theory has been found to impact opinions on advertisements (Gentry & Haley, 1984). There is a little support for gender schema influence on attitudes, inclinations, decision and response expectations (Schmidt et al., 1988). However, youths utilise gender schema to discern, attend to, keep in memory, differentiate, remember and integrate information in order to organise and assess the messages they deem as important, relevant or beneficial. Men and women may view soap operas and intimate relationship portrayals in the programme inversely in relation to their gender schema and in the way these schemas impact self-socialization across media portrayals.

They learn theories, or knowledge structures, about relationships and how they work. Most significantly, they learn from media - particularly from television - how things should be (Baldwin, 1992; Knee, 1998). Though these theories or portrayals may possess restricted scientific validity, social cognitive research has recognised the magnitude of them on impacting young people's perceptions, verdicts and memories in relationships (Fletcher & Fitness, 1996). Beliefs about the significance of various phases of relationships such as passion

and intimacy are included in relationship knowledge (Fletcher et al., 1994). Guidelines about suitable behaviour within relationships (Argyle & Henderson, 1985; Jones & Gallois, 1989), and anticipations around how companions should to act toward one another (Kelley & Burgoon, 1991; Metts, 1994) are impacted upon by television.

#### 2.6.4.1 Gender Schema Self-Socialization

Self-socialization presupposes that young people do not automatically accept the behaviour of characters on television, but actively seek information to compare their own characteristics to those portrayed (Brown, 2000). They are likewise thought to seek out media models that mirror their own thoughts regarding sex- with women favouring programs about connections and individuality (Walsh-Childers & Brown, 1993). Self-accomplishment is an important progressive aim of adolescents and young adults. Gender is a significant aspect for self-awareness, growth and transformation. Young individuals deem intimate relationships as an important area of concern (Bosma, 1992). Moreover, young adults' fantasies and obvious behaviour (Conger & Peterson, 1984; Regt, 1982 in Rouner et al., 2003). They further look for suitable gender task / sexual media representation in line with their gender preferences. Research on youth media consumption indicates that young people look to media messages for information about social role conduct, morals and opinions (Rouner, 1990). Interpretations of television depictions may vary between males and females in light of various needs and interests as per life phases (Gamble & Nelson, 2016).

Gender schema theory is beneficial because it helps understand how schema assists the encoding and retrieval of information (Cantor & Mischel, 1979; Lingle & Ostrom, 1979) and how we would anticipate gender schema-based assessments by television audiences. Of particular importance in this regard is that gender schemas have been found to impact the review of interpretations (Centry & Haley, 1984). This theory is especially applicable to this investigation in that adolescents may utilize gender schemas to observe, attend to, keep in memory, perceive, review and incorporate information to quickly organise and assess the messages they get and relate these to their sentimental relationships.

## 2.7 Conclusion

This chapter introduced the literature review and theoretical frameworks within which the study was conducted. Reception analysis was adapted as a theory because of its appropriateness for audience study. It stresses the significance of seeing the viewer as an ingenious, active agent in the understanding process. Further, drawing from the gender schema point of view, the viewer is provided with all of the tools used to comprehend individuals and anticipate their conduct due to their early recruitment of society's definition of masculinity and femininity. The role of television in shaping beliefs and behaviour of young people was examined in the review. Representation by and audience reception of portrayals by different genres were also looked into.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter examined literature relevant to this study. This chapter focuses on the research methodology used in conducting this research. The chapter discusses three key aspects of the study: research design, research sample and samplings techniques, (instruments that were adopted to gather information - both in-depth interviews and focus groups and the method of data collection) and ethical considerations. The initial part of the chapter comprises a brief prologue to the study and a discussion of the choice of methods used in this research, outlining why this study was a qualitative one. It then describes the participants of this study and how they were selected. Following this is a thorough discussion on the instruments used in the data collection process and the practical stages followed during this process. The chapter concludes with discussing ethics related to this research.

### **3.2 Research Design**

This section discusses in detail the research design and methods designated for this study. As stated previously, the current research is an empirical study. This implies that a qualitative approach is suitable for this study. Qualitative research is conducted through building an interactive relationship between individuals, spaces and things (Ezzy, 2002). This method is helpful because it enables the researcher to recognise issues from the participants' view and understand interpretations they provide to behaviours. The qualitative research approach utilises a naturalistic method which tries to comprehend phenomena and individuals' behaviour, while quantitative research utilises numbers or statistics to comprehend certain events in the community (Bryman, 1984). Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding interpretations or definitions that individuals associate with their experience of the public world and how individuals make sense of that world at a specific time and in a precise context (Bhekhe, 2002). It is essential to comprehend audiences' perception of romantic relationships portrayed on soap operas and thus the qualitative research approach is best suited to this study.

### 3.2.1 Sample and Sampling Techniques

This researcher selected a population of undergraduate students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. Parahoo (2006: 256) describes population as “the total number of units from which data can potentially be collected”. A total of 44 students were recruited and agreed to participate, however, only 30 showed up. Ten interviews and three focus groups were conducted. This sample size is reliable according to Gray’s (2004) argument that in qualitative research, the sample of people should be small and purposive. “That is, number of participants is reasonable because the sample size is not as important a factor as the analysis and the availability of sufficient information” (Huberman & Miles, 1994:27). The focus groups comprised less than eight participants. A bond was easily established due to the small number of participants. As Myers (2000) records: In several circumstances, a small sample size is more convenient in exploring a situation in-depth from several standpoints, while a large sample would be negligible. Going back to the concerns that appeared in every sitting, scrutinising them from diverse standpoints, and unravelling the intertwined lengths of meaning added to a richer, more well-adjusted interpretation which would have been impossible with more participants, the kind of “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) that is important to research of this kind.

The participants were selected by convenience, purposive and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling is a slightly difficult method, which involves choosing from the most readily-available subjects. In purposeful sampling the researcher actively chooses the most useful sample to respond to the research question. Subjects may be able to recommend useful potential candidates for a study (Marshall, 1996). This sampling method is known as snow ball sampling.

Participants were selected from undergraduate student residences. The sample was formed by students who claimed to watch one or all of the four selected soap operas. The reason for choosing undergraduate over post-graduate students was due to the assumption that the undergraduate phase is the time where more students explore and experience dating as compared to their postgraduate counterparts. Students who showed interest in contributing were requested to direct the researcher to their friends who also watch these soap operas.

All participants voluntarily joined in the focus group discussions or interviews without intimidation from the researcher. The sample was formed by international and local black African male and female students, regardless of their relationship status. The reason for this was that these residences are occupied by mostly black African students. Lastly, the study included the thoughts and experience of students in both homosexual and heterosexual relationships.

The researcher used traditional recruitment strategies for this study. The researcher displayed posters that reflected clearly the overall purpose and specific questions being explored, together with the researcher's name and contact information in every undergraduate residence and television rooms two months before she collected data. This recruitment strategy allowed research participants to opt in, were they interested in the study. This was also to give them a chance to contact the researcher. As Illingworth (2001) stated, the researcher's access to populations of interest is a factor in any recruitment strategy. Interested students sent WhatsApp messages to the researcher who called them back to arrange a suitable time for them to meet up. Approximately thirty students contacted the researcher to show their interest and some also directed me to their friends who also watch the four soap operas and would possibly participate in focus groups. Fourteen members of the sample population were directed to me by their friends (snowball sampling), while the other sixteen were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling. Although forty-four students were recruited, only thirty students participated as the other students cancelled while others did not show up on the day of appointment due to the unrest situation on campus during the time of data collection.

### **3.2.2 Research Methods**

The study used both in-depth interviews and focus groups to gather information. As mentioned above, this is a qualitative study. As contended by Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2010), qualitative research is a method that enables one to analyse individuals' encounters thoroughly, by utilising a specific arrangement of research methods, for example, in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, observations content analysis, life histories and/or biographies. Hence, the most appropriate procedures to use for collecting data in this study were in-depth interviews and focus groups.

The qualitative research approach involves conducting thorough individual interviews with a small number of participants in order to examine their standpoints on a particular idea or situation (Beyce and Neale, 2006). Beyce and Neale (2006) further claimed that the main benefit of in-depth interviews is that they offer more comprehensive information than other data collection techniques such as surveys. In-depth interviews provide a more comfortable atmosphere for respondents to provide information than they would when, for example, filling in surveys. In the same way, focus groups are a type of data collection tool that benefit from continuous sharing of information between participants. This implies that the researcher is not required to ask each participant questions individually. Rather participants are motivated to converse with one another through asking questions, swapping experiences and giving remarks on each other's accounts and opinions. The technique is for the most part helpful for investigating individuals' information and encounters and can be utilised to explore what individuals think and the reasons for their opinions. The notion behind the focus group technique is that aggregated procedures can assist individuals in exploring and explaining their perspectives in ways that would be more difficult in a face-to-face interview. Different groups function to take the study in new and unforeseen routes. Team work enables researchers to take advantage of a wide range of responses that individuals use in their daily connections, including jokes, ridiculing and debating. Accessing such an assortment of responses is helpful on the grounds that individuals' learning and states of mind are open to making enquiries (Kitzinger, 1994). Lastly, focus groups can stimulate open discussions about awkward topics and simplify the communication of concepts and accounts that might be left untapped in an interview (Kitzinger, 1994).

### **3.2.2.1 Participants Observation**

Prior to conducting interviews, participation observation was conducted at Malherbe residence. The observation method was primarily adapted by the researcher to understand students' immediate reactions in their natural surroundings, (outside the focus groups and interviews). As Jorgensen (1989) stated, participant observation was the only possible way to witness what goes on, who is involved, how things transpire and why at least from the view point of participants, things occur in a specific way. Becker and Geer (1957) stated that occurrences take place so frequently or subtly during social gatherings that individuals are

not really mindful of them, and do not consider to mention them to the researcher. They could even have been unaware of them at all and as a result been unable to respond to direct inquiries. In other words, different occasions might be unfamiliar to the point that individuals think that it is hard to articulate their emotions about what has occurred. The researcher felt that this was less likely to occur should she spend time with the students whilst they watched the soap operas. Things which may not necessarily have been apparent in an interview were observed during these times. Specific occurrences in the soap operas which could influence the students could then later be referred to and questioned as part of the study. Having been present during some of the soap opera viewing also helped the researcher during data analysis to comprehend what the respondents meant in their discussions. For instance, if participants don't understand the question, it was easier to refer to an event that happen during the observation process. Thirdly, after watching soap operas with potential groups and individual participants, the researcher provided the sample with an outlined of the proposed research and gave them the opportunity for questions they may have about participating. The researcher contacted prospective respondents who expressed interest in participating in the study a week before the arranged interview and focus group times for confirmation. Participant observation took place over three months (August to October 2016 from season 5, episode 16 to season 6. Episode 81: *Skeem Saam*, and episodes 179-240 *Generations the Legacy*). The researcher was only able to be involved in participatory observation for these two programmes as the other two played very late and the researcher resided far from Malherbe residence.

### **3.2.2.2 In-depth interviews**

Ten in-depth interviews were held at Malherbe residence. The participants comprised five males and five females. The other twenty students selected participated in the focus groups. It is fundamental that in qualitative research, the sample be a reasonable size in order to obtain rich and comprehensive information, dissimilar to data sets which may pose an issue of repetition (Flick, 1998; Morse, 1995 in Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The reason for this choice of site was, unlike other undergraduate residences, both males and females reside in Malherbe. Therefore, it was safe and convenient for the researcher to observe the participants watching the soap operas since they are aired at night and viewers could be

spoken to immediately after the programmes. This was at times challenging as students were eager to watch the next soap opera that was about to air. Securing participants for the face-to-face interviews proved a further challenge, as some students felt uncomfortable at the thought of personal questions. Each interview took approximately thirty minutes. Interviews were conducted in various locations with some students inviting the researcher to their rooms and others being interviewed in their classrooms after lectures. The conversations between the interviewees and the researcher were recorded using a mobile phone with permission from the participants.

### **3.2.2.3 Focus Group Discussions**

Three focus groups were conducted with students from five undergraduate residences (*Petrie, YMCA, WOB, Seminary and Malherbe*) for cross-pollination of data. Initially, the plan was to conduct a focus group from each undergraduate residence, but some students did not arrive and therefore students were mixed from different residences. The focus groups were conducted in the common room at Denison residence. Each group was made up of between six and eight participants. As Krueger and Casey (2000) suggested, the optimum number of participants is between six and eight participants as smaller groups show greater potential. The groups were comprised as follows: Group 1: three females from *Petrie* and three females from the *YMCA*, Group 2; five men from *WOB* and three men from *Seminary*; and Group 3: a mixed-sex focus group consisting of three females and three males from *Malherbe*. The groups were formed from students other than those who had participated in the one-on-one interviews. The reason for having a mixed-gender focus group was to have a chance to observe male and female interactions among the undergraduate students who stay in school residences, and in what manner they behave and communicate about romantic relationships in the company of the opposite sex. Both focus group discussions and interviews were carried out on different days to accommodate students' schedules and in order to avoid the groups from manipulating one another. The length of each focus group sitting was about forty-five minutes. The data was gathered through mobile phone recordings and later transcribed. Refreshments were served during the discussion as a form of appreciation for taking time out of their studies to participate in the study.

The focus group discussions were used to gain insight into the opinions of young individuals on the influence of soap operas on romantic relationships, their gender roles in relationships, sexual expectations and choice of partners. Facilitating the mixed-gender discussion group was for challenging as the female participants expressed uneasiness or shyness in discussing such issues with males. Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to their participation. In this study, the small sample certified for the correct gathering of data from both interviews and focus groups that were informative. Group participation was enhanced by the small group size and the closeness among the respondents. The students' familiarity with one another permitted them to express themselves to comfortably offer differing perceptions and experiences. The small group size permitted questioning and the recording of explanations that could simply not be carried out in a larger group.

### **3.2.3 Data Analysis**

Rugg and Petre (2007) maintained that the overall context and purpose of the researcher's study determines the way in which the data will be analysed. This implies that there is normally no complete method of analysing data. Mouton (1996:111) describes data analysis as the process of "identifying patterns and themes in the data and drawing certain conclusions from them". Blanche and Durrheim (2006) stated that data analysis focuses on transforming information or data to respond to the initial research question. Qualitative data analysis frequently involves content, thematic, comparative and discourse analysis (Dawson, 2002). This range suggests that there is no singular or correct way of analysing qualitative data (Cohen *et al.*, 2007). This study used thematic analysis to assess the in-depth interviews, focus groups and literature review. Neuman (2006) defines thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and recording patterns (themes) within data. It minimally organizes and describes your data set in rich detail. However, frequently it goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic (Boyatzis, 1998).

Ideas emerged during the focus groups and interviews that can be readily understood under the control of a thematic analysis. The main focus of thematic analysis is to identify themes and patterns of living and/or conduct (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The initial step was to collect the data and audiotapes to study the discussions of focus groups and interviews. Patterns of

experiences or accounts have been listed from the transcribed discussions. Spradley (1979) specified that this can come from direct quotes or the rephrasing of shared ideas. The full discussion was transcribed.

The next step in a thematic analysis is to recognise all data linked to the previously-categorised patterns. These recognised patterns are then explained. All the discussions that fitted under a particular pattern were recognised and placed with their corresponding patterns.

Patterns were then organised and recorded into sub-themes. Themes are classified as elements derived from patterns such as "conversation topics, vocabulary, recurring activities, meanings, feelings, folk sayings and proverbs" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1989: 131). These themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (Leininger, 1985: 60). Themes that emerged from the respondents' discussions were patched together to form a detailed image of their shared accounts. The "coherence of ideas rests with the analyst who has rigorously studied how different ideas or components fit together in a meaningful way when linked together" (Leininger, 1985:60).

The next step in a thematic analysis entails constructing a valid reason for selecting the themes. This is carried out by acquiring information and reviewing literature which permits the researcher to construct inferences from the interview and focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Once the themes are gathered and the literature reviewed, the researcher is then set to build theme statements and create a story line. A developed story line assists the reader in understanding the process and purpose of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.2.3.1 Phases of Thematic Analysis**

1. Familiarizing myself with my data: this is transcribing data (re-reading the data and stating down initial ideas.)
2. Generating initial codes: coding interesting features of data and organising data relevant to each other.
3. Searching for themes: Organising codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data to each potential theme.

4. Reviewing themes: Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts.
5. Defining and naming themes: refining the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, whilst producing clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Producing the report: The final stage for analysis. Selection of rich data, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back to the analysis of the research question and literature, and producing a scholarly report of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical issues are a significant concern in social science research. Mollet (2011) stated that it is crucial to show respect for ethical issues when undertaking research involving human participants. Similarly, Gray (2004:58) added that “the ethics of the research concern the appropriateness of the researcher’s behaviour in relation to the subjects of the research or those who are affected by it”. Such social science research must involve itself with ethical consistency to guarantee that research processes and results are trustworthy and accurate (Biber, 2005). Ethical issues were observed before progressing with this research. A permission letter requesting the collection of data in the residences was obtained from the University’s Registrar. As Guthrie (2010:16) emphasised, “approval of the research project is usually required by your academic institution...” After permission from the registrar was granted, the researcher’s proposal was reviewed by the University’s ethical clearance committee who provided the researcher with ethical consent to interview the students. Data was gathered only once ethical clearance from the University had been given. Informed consent was acquired from each research respondent prior to taking part in the focus group discussion and interviews. In addition, respondents’ permission was sought prior to recording any discussion.

Participants were further notified about their right to withdraw from the discussions should they feel uncomfortable. Privacy of the respondents was upheld. They would each be represented by a number such as ‘P1, P2’ etc. and by this, the participants’ names were not used. This ensured discretion and the protection of their identities. Each group was given an exclusive name- the first group being “FM”, standing for “focus-group Malherbe”, whilst the

second group were given the name “FYP”, standing for “YMCA & Petrie” and the third group was labelled “FSW”, which stands for “Seminary & WOB”. These names were used to distinguish which group specific material arose from. A declaration was given that all information would be handled in a completely confidential manner.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to outline how the entire study was conducted. This was considered essential in order to give the reader a clear picture of the steps and procedures carried out during the study as well as in collecting the data. The chapter presented an overview of the research design and methodology, as well as the sampling method employed. Ethical issues were also considered. The next chapters (4 & 5) will present the results and interpretation of the research findings.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS SOAP OPERAS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON STUDENTS' ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

Chapter three concentrated on research methodology and methods as well as the ethical issues that were employed in this study. The key purpose of Chapter four is to examine the perceptions of students towards soap operas and their influence on romantic relationships. This was done through discussing the results obtained from the focus groups and interviews with undergraduate students at University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus. This chapter could be considered the fundamental section of the current study. It attempts to address the objectives and research questions of the present study. It also refers to existing literature and theories adopted by this study.

### **4.2 Perceptions Towards Soap Operas**

Television and soap operas are everyday activity Strelitz (2004). University students make up a fraction of the age group of young people who have little experience in subjects of romance and love but are interested therein. "It can be anticipated that the portrayal of interpersonal relationships among soap characters, essentially the young people romances, may impact on the expectations and conceptions of younger female viewers in a strong fashion" (Greenberg et al, 1982:534). As Arnett (2000) claims, growing in maturity is an exceptional time for identity formation for youths. It is therefore essential to appraise if television is capable of providing them with necessary information to self-socialise their sexual identities. According to Gamble and Nelson (2016) it is clear that developing into adulthood is a period when increased independence and the postponement of responsibility give individuals the freedom to discover their sexual identities. Female participants in the study were shown to look to television for new fashion trends and ideas about intimacy. Content analysis of soap operas has also suggested that soap operas emphasise an exchange of ideas about relationships that may draw in young people (Cantor & Pingree, 1983; Cassata & Skill, 1983). For this reason, the researcher found it imperative to investigate the perception of these portrayals by UKZN undergraduate students.

#### 4.2.1 Providing Fantasy and Escape

Fantasy appeared to be the main theme on the perception of romantic relationships on local television soap operas. This is evident in the number of participants who brought this subject up. The participants emphasised the exaggeration of events by soap operas. The discussion around exaggerating and idealistic rather than realistic portrayals of romantic relationships came up in all focus groups and interviews, with participants classifying these aspects as being the fundamental characteristics of soap operas. While it is essential to be attentive to emphasis placed upon perfectionist and fairy-tale portrayals of relationships, this may to some extent be due to the impressionable age of the respondents in this study. The study recognised undergraduates as the audience through which to investigate the effects of soap operas' portrayal of relationships. It was notable to observe how much group discussions focused on aspects of fantasy.

FYP: P1 *"They are to some extent exaggerated, I mean I know it's not real, but I enjoy it all the same."*

FYP: P2: *"Yeah, I mean sometimes we need some break away from our books and all the stress."*

FYP: P3: *"And when you are single and lonely, soap operas can influence one to desire to be in a relationship"*

P1: *"sometimes I'm just like can I just get a role on television whereby I'd be acting as Kumkani's girlfriend or wife...kiss him till I am satisfied, thereafter, quit acting and go back my partner. (Laughing). You know, I cannot watch him and not fantasize about him".*

Literature also reinforced the significance of fantasy in relating to soap opera romance. Spence (1995) specifically debated that watching soap operas is living through fiction which we consider to be real enough to make moral conclusions, developing opinions and associating them to what we recognise in reality. As Spence (1995) pointed out, viewers repeatedly describe instances of excess and folly in soap operas as "great". What really fascinates viewers is the element of craziness and hyperbole of events. During the interviews,

it was clear that respondents found some way to link the occasions and characters depicted on the soap operas to their own lived experiences. That is, they fantasised about some of the things they watch on soap operas. They feel as if their own relationships lack something. It also seems like the fantasy derived from soap opera watching is at times what leads students to commence dating. Students appear to fantasize about relationships on soap operas and wish to experience the same things. These soap operas make students have higher expectations of their loved ones than they would otherwise have. In order to explore this subject further, participants were asked the following question, "How are relationships portrayed in local television soap operas?"

Participants' responses were as follows:

FM: P1 *"I feel like they are unrealistic and also idealistic."*

FM: P2: *"Yes, they do sometimes put things that happen, but are not practical in real life".*

As Spence (1995:182) put it "soap operas are unfaithful to someone's idea of reality. The extravagance, the likeliness, the hyperbole, departs from the limit of common sense".

FM: P3 *"Yeah! I mean soap operas are too exaggerated but who needs the boring life, it's not too bad to live in a dreamland for that thirty minutes. Just wish everything was as perfect as in the soap opera."*

P2: *"Soap operas do portray reality, the only problem with them they just go beyond the extreme. They are however exciting and that element of fantasy and exaggeration makes one long to see the next episode."*

According to Spence, "soap operas' extravagant feelings, behaviours and circumstances may strain credibility, but they are also an important source of energy and excitement" (1995:182). In summary, according to responses gathered from the data, participants alluded to the fact that soap operas can be both informative and idealistic. They were regarded as "going slightly overboard" in their portrayal of events. This however did not bother the viewers as they

acknowledge that soap operas were designed for entertainment purposes. The consensus amongst the majority of participants was that even though they are aware that soap operas are made up from a world of fantasy, they watch them for entertainment. They provide an escape from their everyday lives and inform them on how to handle certain issues in reality. This means soap operas do have a positive effect on students' relationships. Should challenges arise in the students' real-life relationships, they are able to refer back to what happened in the soap opera and handle the situation in a similar manner. The responses led to the researcher enquiring about why they enjoy watching soap operas despite them thinking soap operas are exaggerated.

Their responses were as follows:

P3: *"I don't know hey, I mean I enjoy them...It is a break from everything".*

P4: *"I enjoy them really; the different characters and learning about other people's lives. You know, it's somehow similar to what happens in everyday kind of life. Somehow, when you're tired from lectures and you watch soap operas. It's sort of getting away from the stress of university life, basically, I find them very refreshing."*

P5: *"We learn a lot of things from soap operas and they help us relax."*

Participants seemed to watch soap operas for entertainment purposes and for relaxing. Participants found ways to link the events and characters depicted on soap operas to their own lived experiences. All responded that they do at times come across or face the same situations as portrayed in soap operas. This makes it easier to deal with or relate to what the soap opera is trying to demonstrate. The exaggeration of events in soap operas allows one to suspect when a relationship is too good to be true. Soap operas also helped students to escape from reality. For instance, at the end of the day, students are exhausted from academic life and day-to-day problems. Stress is relieved by laughing at humorous things that happen on soap operas.

Most students disagreed with the perfection of relationships portrayed on screen. According to the participants, things on screen appear to be "perfect" and "easy".

FSW: P1 *“Sometimes things on soap operas are just too good to be true, for instance Mbali-Enhle’s relationship with Sakhile was just too perfect.”*

FSW: P2 *“Well, until Lelo showed up and messed up everything for them” they laughed. This however showed some element of realism in soap operas because this kind of things actually happen in life. I have seen people coming between two people who love each other due to jealousy.”*

FSW: P3: *“These kind of portrayals do help one to be careful about friends and roommates. Hence, we become so uncomfortable once we see our partners becoming very close with our friends. I mean it causes so much attention between lovers. Thus we learned from soap operas that anything can happen.”*

The above comments indicate that students sometimes find comfort in soap opera portrayals as these display what happens in real life situations. They learn from these portrayals that problems are part of relationships. It is these kinds of portrayals that bring show conflict and brings about learning that every relationship goes through challenges.

FSW: P1 *“Soap operas are exaggerated and everything appears to be perfect”*

FSW:P3 *“Still on that note of perfectionism, there is this guy called Jama who is also too perfect... this other time we were talking as boys and most of us were complaining about Jama. It seems like our girlfriends expect us to be like Jama. Jama would bring breakfast in bed for his girlfriend, go to varsity, and work part-time in a restaurant to pay for their rent and still come back home to prepare dinner for both of them. Who does that?”*

FSW: P4 *“And that is not healthy for relationships, it puts us under unnecessary pressure”*

FSW: P1 *“Some of us, our relationships had to end as we couldn’t keep up with the nagging and pressure”*

It appears that the way Jama handled his relationship with Ayanda in the soap *Skeem Saam* affected many real-life relationships as girls in the study reported complaining to their partners that if Jama could do that, it meant they also deserved the same treatment. This young couple from *Skeem Saam* and are both University of Johannesburg students. Male

respondents to the study, on the other hand, complained of stress and pressure that this portrayal comes with. Some male respondents were inspired that they needed to make an effort to improve their relationship skills, while others were really annoyed by girls nagging them and had decided to end their relationships. The fact that students find relationships on soap operas too perfect is further demonstrated by Wittebols (2004) who stated that the mastermind of the soap opera paradigm has been perfected in such a way that it transcends reality. The perfectionism of relationships on soap operas seemed to affect students' relationships as women would expect more from their partners, while men would feel the pressure of keeping their women happy and not having their efforts appreciated. This is also supported by Helgeson, Shaver and Dyer (1987) study which found that both male and females report feeling appreciated by their partner as crucial.

In essence, the core of soap operas lies in providing fantasy and escape from our real lives stressful situations. The researcher also concurs with research participants' views, for soap operas are another form of therapy. They help us forget about reality and concentrate of the portrayals for a short while.

#### **4.2.2 Fostering Unrealistic Expectations and False Hope**

Due to their exaggeration, viewers indicated that soap operas seem to differ from what they had been taught as they grew up. As gender schema theory pointed out previously, as young individuals develop, they absorb behaviour from their caregivers and culture regarding what relationships are all about (Knee, 1998).

According to the participants in this study, soap opera relationships differed from real-life relationships. Participants' responses were as follows regarding this issue.

*P6: "These soap operas sell us false hope. You can reach a certain agreement with your partner and try to leave by each other's expectations but still things don't go as smooth as they make them seem. And just the level of forgiveness on soap operas is just too much. Relationships on soap operas survive almost everything."*

*"Exactly, soap operas can make one to believe in fairy tales but one hardly encounter such things in real life."*

FSW: P4 *"They are just deceiving us. For instance, Lelo from Skeem Saam has done a number of wicked things that Mangaliso knew about and have evidence but he is going after her and worse invited her into his house with his girlfriend. I mean really, who does that?"*

FM: P1 *"Sometimes they just make us feel stupid and naïve"*

FM: P2 *"Yep, look at Tau and Karabo's relationship. Those two are totally from different worlds. Karabo hates evil actions but she was somehow able to keep up with Tau's deeds no matter how much she disapproves. I mean in real life I for one wouldn't stay with someone who kills and manipulate people every chance he gets. Never"*

FM: P3 *"Yeah! Just like how they always make us believe every relationship has a happy ending"*

FM: P4 *"Precisely! Every story has that happy ending on soap operas and movies"*  
*'Laughing' "from soul mate to happy ending"*

This discrepancy between real life and television was also supported by literature. For instance, Holmes (2004) stated that the idea of soul mates is one of the prime sentimental ideals created in love stories. This notion proposes that fate plays a part in romance and relationships. Destiny brings prospective romantic partners who are destined for each other together. An individual who catches their soul mate will achieve and uphold relationship happiness easily. Also inferred in this conviction is the idea that long-term relationship triumph is not achieved with anybody but with the "true" soul mate (Holmes, 2004).

One participant in the study referred to Lelo and Mangaliso's relationship in the soap *Skeem Saam*. Mangaliso went to the point of breaking up with his girlfriend Lizzy, who has been through thick and thin with him, just to be with Lelo. He did this despite everyone warning him about her. In this case, one can conclude that fate brought these two together and they are "true soul mates". It appeared that the same "fairy tale" may sometimes be what sustains student relationships, as they hold on to their relationships even when things are not going well in the hope that, just like on soap operas, things will eventually work out. As Lelo fought

for Mangaliso, sometimes students stay in their relationships and fight until they win their loved ones back. This perception affect students' relationships in different manners as some complain that "hope for fairy tale" makes them stay in relationships and fight a losing battle, while they could have left with some dignity. Another example of this is the relationship between characters Tau and Karabo in the soap *Generations*. Their relationship worked against all odds simply because these two are real soul mates.

People who have faith in the notions of soul mates and fate devote their time attempting to seek the "right partner". Accepting a partner or relationship less than one's ideal indicates failure to live up to one's potential. Yet Holmes (2004) would contend that embracing such a belief may lead to fast-ending relationships where initial satisfaction is low. According to Holmes (2004:3), the idea that "one can find a soul mate that fits perfectly with defined standards and beliefs is an unrealistic view that fails to take into account the work required in developing and maintaining a healthy and loving relationship". It is apparent from the views of learners interviewed and substantiated by literature that soap operas portray relationships in an unrealistic light.

Literature on soap opera fantasy presents one with the conclusion that the portrayals of romantic relationships on soap operas are mostly exaggerated and are usually understood and interpreted differently by viewers. Another feature of soap operas is that they can closely resemble the daily life of the viewer. It can be contended that soap narrative and the life narratives of soap viewers are similar and frequently intertwined. It is advocated that soap operas are a vehicle used to escape the burdens and practices of daily life. Yet to conclude that soap operas are simply used for escape, is to overlook much of the diversity underlying soap narrative (Marx, 2008). Although there is a vast difference between soap opera and "reality", soap operas feed, for instance, on fears that have a basis in reality. According to Modleski (1982: 108), it is crucial to identify that the soap opera "calms real anxieties, and satisfies real needs and desires, even while it may distort them. Examples of this include the need for human interaction or romantic love that is central to both soap opera narratives and "reality"". It is evident that there are several areas where it becomes possible for the "real" lives of audiences to intertwine with the "authenticity" produced on the episodes of soap operas. We further realise that the viewer experiences enjoyment of soap operas by escaping

the self. For that thirty minutes they spend, viewers are able to temporarily escape real-life distresses and worries. This can provide lead to relaxation by allowing the viewer to focus on the media stimulus rather than the self (De Kock, 2010). The researcher of the current study is also a fan of soap operas and unlike the participants, she appreciates the exaggeration of events on soap operas as they help individuals to analyse situations before they mimic everything they see on the screen.

#### **4.2.3 Problem-Solving Skills**

In some cases, participants mentioned that soap operas help them solve their problems.

Learners also expressed that:

*FM:P5 “Soap operas can be used to solve our own problems for a while, if you are faced with a challenge in your relationship it’s easier to draw back to how someone dealt with the same problem in a soap opera then you are sorted”*

*P7: “Sometimes you get irritated when something happens on the soap opera, for instance most girls were annoyed while Sakhile from Skeem Saam cheated on Mbali-Enhle, and we kind of relate it with our own relationships. But that’s not where it ends. After being irritated, one actually try to put themselves in the situation. Should the same thing had happened to you, how you could have dealt with it?”*

*FM: P6 “If you watch Meiki, she is my role model, she always has a solution whenever one of her family member is in trouble. I’m a married women so most of the times, I just use Meiki’s strategies to solve my problems.”*

Through watching the actors resolve difficulties on soap operas, audiences can learn how to resolve their own difficulties. It could be argued that soap operas help students improve their problem-solving skills. Students could refer to how a particular character dealt with a similar situation to one they are experiencing in real life and this could give one a better analysis of a problem as well as different perspectives.

*P8 “Sometimes you have a problem in your relationship and you see the same problem on the soap and it helps you to solve yours.”*

Galician (2004) the writer of a crucial analysis of romantic media, retained that individuals look for romantic content in the media in order to see relationships that appear to work out despite impediments. Previous studies have acknowledged that young individuals look for romantic content on television and different media to learn about relationships (Wood et al, 2002). It was discovered from the participants' experiences that soap opera viewing is not only for entertainment but also as an educational experience. As mentioned previously, some undergraduate students do not have enough experience in dating and soap operas can "educate" them how relationships are handled. Relationships portrayed in soap operas tend to keep evolving and can give pointers on how to make real-life relationships more exciting. The participants concur that there is more to soap operas than just entertainment. They discovered that seeing an on-screen couple going through something can cause them to reflect back on stages of their own relationships. Soap opera portrayals may function as a wakeup call in reality. The researcher of this study also perceives this as true, soap operas display events that are close to what happens in real life. It is much easier to reflect back to a similar situation in a soap operas whenever a person has to deal with a new challenge. Individuals are also unlikely to avoid mistakes made by actors on soap operas.

FYP: P5 *"In other cases, like Skeem Saam, we saw the part where Leeto had to abandon his Dj life and start working as a lawyer after getting married. His family actually advised him to close that chapter of his life as it could be dangerous for his family and Leeto was shot on his wedding day. That's a lesson to us men. I mean, that's what happens in real life, after marriage, a man need to be a bit responsible and sacrifice the things he used to like or enjoy".*

FYP: P6 *"Absolutely, we all know that in real life, after marriage one has to give up his/her interests such as clubbing and the likes and start behaving like a family man or woman."*

FYP: P2 *"Also the case of Vusi and Katlego whereby Vusi had to kiss his dream a goodbye once he realized his girlfriend was pregnant. Although he was excited for his admission to Harvard University, Vusi had to come back home from USA to take care of his family. Like their situation was complicated because there was also Vusi's mother getting involved and adamant that Vusi should leave but Vusi did the right thing. This*

*was a lesson to many of us, I for one wouldn't really know what to do if tables were to be turned."*

The comments by men in the focus groups indicated that students were aware how soap operas played a role in informing them in the light of their traditional gender roles as men. As Nguyen et al., (2010:603) put it, gender roles *are* "the attitudes and behaviours that are deemed appropriate for women and men's social and sexual interactions".

*FYP: P3 "The Vusi situation really moved me, because this often to our sisters who have been impregnated and left to raise the kids on their own. It made me realise how cruel that action is and it's so common in South Africa. I actually vowed if ever I impregnate someone in future, I'll definitely take full responsibility"*

Viewers appear to learn a lot from soap opera characters' mistakes and successes and internalise these lessons. Soap operas are therefore important for enhancing viewers' problem-solving skills and knowledge of relationship responsibilities. It should be noted that students did complain about the way things are portrayed by soap operas. In particular, the concept of perfectionism seems to be unsettling. Further from the participants' comments, it seems like the choices Leeto and Vusi made assisted some men to be introspective. They disclosed that these incidents made them aware that they needed to take responsibility as providers. This really had an impact on male students as it taught them about their roles as boyfriends and future husbands. They learned that there would be a time when they will have to grow up and sacrifice fun for the sake of their loved ones. This is normal practice in African cultures where the man is seen as the provider. This is in line with gender schema theory, which indicated that apart from learning about gender roles from an early age, media is a very crucial educator in this arena (Bem, 1981). Each day is a new opportunity to learn new things and from the researcher's point of view soap operas are doing pretty well in educating individuals to solve their problems by leaning from the characters' behaviours which also assist in enhancing our problem solving skills.

#### 4.2.4 Promoting Women's Empowerment

The study analysed the impact of portrayals of successful women in soap operas on real-life women's enablement. According to Keller and Mbwewe (1991) cited in Varghese, (2011:37) women empowerment is "a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination." As Ahmed and Khalid (2012) established, media is thorough, dominant and influential in spreading new knowledge. It is beneficial for behaviour modification among women and hence in manipulating women's empowerment variables. In their responses, participants from a mixed gender group confirm the above statements:

FM: P5 *"Yes, I watch them for entertainment but there is more to soap operas than just entertainment. Sometimes they empower us as women. For instance, I learnt from Karabo and Thandaza by being career women and CEO's that class gives you power over men. Once you are financially stable you can also be superior. You won't have to wait for your man to provide for you. You make things happen."*

FM: P2 *"And I have realised this is evident in even in real life, when you depend on a man with everything they turn to take advantage. They treat you like you are nothing, hence I have learned not to ask anything from my boyfriend. Well, he can spoil me with gifts and all but it should be willingly not because I'm desperate. It makes a lot of ladies vulnerable."*

It was noticeable that some participants felt empowered by the representation of successful women on television in contrast to them being portrayed as housewives or ladies waiting for their partners to take care of them financially.

FM: P6 *"I totally agree, unlike back then, we love our women independent. You can't be relying on me for everything and expect me to take you serious. Things are expensive out here"* (Laughter)

FM: P5 *"Absolutely! Ladies never learn. Dependency put our lives at risk. Just think about the statistics of women who are being killed in South Africa by their boyfriends"*

*and blessers. I prefer to do things myself. Rather safe than sorry! Imagine being killed for Brazilian wavy.”*

*FM: P2 “Yeah, because if a man do everything for you, you automatically become part of his property. They expect you to do everything they want, thus he feels you are indebted to him. That’s when they kill you if you resist. It’s kind of off, I finance you with everything and in return I expect sexual favours. It’s more like each of us should play their role. So, let’s rather be partners not my burden. It works for my relationships.”*

Initially, some men felt that a woman’s role in this context is to pay back the money by pleasing a man. Pleasing him includes giving herself entirely to him by satisfying his sexual pleasure. Discussions with participants have shown that they regard this as means of oppressing women. It was also discovered that female participants seem to have been inspired by independent women on TV and it really helped them with their own romantic relationships. When one depends on a man entirely, they are unlikely to recognise such woman as a person but rather as cheap and there can be lack of respect in the relationship. If there is no respect, the relationship is bound to fail. It seemed from their comments that some men share the women’s sentiments. Successful women in soap operas inspire women to be empowered in actual relationships. According to participants, if both partners are able to meet their financial needs the relationship is bound to work as none feels superior to the other.

Ahmed and Khalid (2012) debated that women’s empowerment could create an atmosphere where women can fully utilise their potential and ability to build an improved human society and that media has a vital role to play in this. Access to media is seen as essential for social reform and numerous movements towards attaining a better quality of life for women (Ahmed & Khalid, 2012).

*FSW: P3 “As a man, money will bring the girl you want, and it’s a struggle while you are still studying like us. The competition is too tight with blessers because of ladies who can’t do anything for themselves. I’m saying this through experience because once my girlfriend left me for an older guy who was loaded. I wish the portrayal of women like Thandaza and Karabo can empower our ladies to realize their capability to take*

*care of their finances. I know that not every women will get to understand this, but surely it must have changed some ladies' mentality out there"*

*FSW: P5 "Bruh! I really hope this can empower these slay queens who enjoy going to fancy restaurants so that they can check in on social medias, popping expensive champagne while they can't even settle half of their bill. That kind of behaviour is embarrassing and as a man I can see she is not the type to wife."*

*FSW: P4 "Hence they mostly attract older married guys, who are looking for fun not wife materials. They exploit our young women then get married to innocent decent girls who can afford their living expenses or at least see potential. So ladies, continue leaving us for blessers, you'll remain slaying and lonely for the rest of your lives because nobody on their sound mind will touch or wife you." (Laughter)*

*FSW: P1 "Yeah, those men are just after casual sex nothing serious."*

This was supported by Buss (1988) and Hill (2002) cited in Grello, Welsh and Harper, (2006) who attested that gender is a significant element in casual sex participation because males have constantly been found to have more casual sex partners than females. Further, participants revealed that relationships have of late become such a burden, especially to men because all women want these days is a "walking automated teller machine (ATM)" in the form of a man who will take them to fancy restaurants and pay their bills. They maintained that women learn these tendencies from soap opera exposure. Male participants stated that with the bad economy the last thing they need in their lives is a woman who is high maintenance and who can't afford to settle half of her bills. Hence relationships don't survive, if one has nothing to offer. According to respondents, relationships only work if there is collective effort. Men can envision a long-term relationship when this collective effort is evident. It became clear that what one brings to the relationship adds value to that relationship and this goes for both male and female.

Participants in the study further maintained that it is fair to acknowledge soap operas for empowering women and making them realise that they can be capable of working hard and taking care of their financial problems. This helps them to avoid being victims of abuse and rape just because a man took care of their financial requirements. Participants felt that soaps

had a role to play in changing perceptions that a woman had to be beautiful in order to be recognized by a rich man. Women are often taken for granted because of their financial dependence on men. It was clear during the study that the issue of dependency is a significant one for the majority of male students as they are not yet financially stable and as such are unable to spoil their partners.

Soap operas effort to empower women to see themselves as capable of taking care of their financial problems rather than depending on men is remarkable. It assists women to recognise their strengths and avoid being victims of abuse. Soap operas encourage couples to address topics which partners are normally hesitant to discuss. It is easier to talk about couples' financial situation after watching an episode which addresses the similar situation.

#### **4.2.5 Portraying Infidelity**

Participants showed that in certain instances, soap operas seem to portraying infidelity that occurs in relationships. As Estep and Macdonald (1985) pointed out, infidelity, illegal births, divorce and heavy petting have often been believed to be what soap operas are all about. Greenberg and Busselle (1996) similarly said that the most common element is a consistent trace of infidelity. Unfaithfulness stays a subject of key interest in current culture and is regularly included in media such as soap operas (Greenberg & Busselle, 1996; Greenberg & Woods, 1999 in Mcanulty & Brineman, 2007). It is also included as the content in daytime talk shows (Greenberg et al, 1997). The literature reveals several operational meanings of infidelity. According to Blow & Hartnett (2005), the term infidelity is frequently used to refer to cheating, being unfaithful, having an affair, stepping out on and extra dyadic involvement.

*P6 "Sometimes they focus more on infidelity. Almost every soap opera have some love triangle drama. I remember back then on Muvhango Thandaza was married to Edward and he had a side chick called Doobsie, later Thandaza married Ranthumeng, there was Tebogo. But then, the issue of side chicks is so real, we see it all the times. The side chick will just tell you straight up I'm going to snatch him away. With the people I know it really happened that way. Sometimes one may not agree with what happened on the soap opera but can learn that if I it happened to me I would have rather dealt with it this way."*

*P7 "Soap operas emphasises more on the element of infidelity, we hardly see portrayal of relations without love triangle drama. For instance, Skeem Saam there was Lelo, Kwaito and Rachel, Lelo, Mangaliso and Lizzy. Muvhango, Mulalo, Tebogo and Shonisani, Thandaza, Ranthumeng and Tebogo, it doesn't end there, Generations the Legacy: Mazwi, Simphiwe and Nolwazi. Yeah but all I'm saying is there is always the 3<sup>rd</sup> person"*

Students' opinions were in line with the literature that soap operas revolve a lot around infidelity. All the four selected soap operas portrayed an element of infidelity. Though none of the research participants voiced this out, soap operas make available answers to questions that do not exist. For instance, for inexperienced young couples without any knowledge how they would handle their partners' infidelity, soap operas by discussing the issues over and over, they make available of options for viewers. As Worden (2013) pointed out what the audience gain after watching these scenes is very a detailed examination or discussion of any issue. In addition, Wittebols (2004) indicated that the way in which a soap opera story unfolds on television empowers the viewers by providing them an omniscient point of view. Thus soap operas portray various characters' point of view.

#### **4.2.6 Instilling Fashion Sense**

The current study has recognised that the watching of soap operas has an impact on fashion sense of viewers. According to Solomon and Rabolt (2004), cited in Handa and Khare (2013:114) fashion is "a form of collective behaviour or a wave of social conformity. Individuals tend to seek group conformity by enhancing their social self-image". In a similar way, students reported learning about fashion from soap operas. Their responses were as follows:

*FYP: P2 "Yeah, we also get to see how/ what to wear on a romantic dates. Some of us have never been on a date before so.... (Laughter)."*

*FYP: P4 "Our lives revolve around soap operas, we get intimidated by soap operas portrayals on daily basis. Fashion, relationships, food and the likes. Our lives are soap opera centred. "*

It is clear in this study that soap operas introduce students to new fashions. Fashion changes seasonally and television will always give individuals a heads-up on what is available or in fashion for a particular season. This phenomenon was especially agreed with by those students with little dating experience. Students who had not been on dates before and were unsure of dress codes reported to looking to soaps for advice thereon. These findings are also supported by Greene's (2008) observations that self-improving lifestyles and "must-have" fashions are portrayed in USA dramas.

#### **4.2.7 Encouraging Learning About Culture**

According to Fiske (1989) television is a cultural product. Kastoryano (n.d.) in Mungela, (2011) defined culture as a dynamic concept that changes through interactions over time and space. Hall (1989) on the other hand, noted that culture deals with meanings, values, identities, symbols, ideas, knowledge, language and ideology. It further makes up the world in which we live and we in turn recreate or refashion it. There are many approaches to culture and even more definitions (Richard, 2000). The participants also showed that they learned about different cultures from soap operas.

*P1: "I grew up watching them, I just got used to watching them. It's more like tradition now, where I come from every night we used to watch them. However, I believe our lives are soap opera centred so most definitely have an impact in our relationships"*

*P9: "For me, sometimes the interest was triggered by curiosity. For instance Skeem Saam was something new, different setting, a move away from other soap opera which are always played in Johannesburg. Skeem Saam is played in Limpopo. So, I was curious about the end of the story. So was with Muvhango, people portraying their culture. Actually, Skeem Saam, Muvhango, Uzalo are very unique. They gave me a chance to learn about other people's culture in their setting, now if I date any of the guys from that culture I know how to handle them or at least have an idea what to expect."*

*FYP: P2 "Hence I said, there is a lot we learn from the soap operas. They are really informative, if only they can stop doing it too much and just be moderate in their portrayal."*

P4: *“One get to learn about other cultures besides their own on soap operas. That’s where you actually make a choice what’s your preference in a mate (a Zulu, Sotho or Venda) since it’s easier to learn how they handle relationships.”*

It is evident that local soap operas offer examples of a range of cultures. As Eastwick (2013:163) put it, “cultural transmission can also take place as people are subtly exposed to different cultural variants...” For instance, as students continue to view soap operas, they become interested in learning more about different cultures. Respondents stated that this would be useful should they date someone from a different culture.

The researcher of this study further emphasised that soap operas are important in teaching about different cultures. For example, one may not know that the Zulu and Venda cultures still permit polygamy and arranged marriages, often linked to family business alliances. Eastwick (2013) indicated that given that cultural alternatives are often passed from one mind to another, culture can also be studied using interventions or other experimental manipulations of the social transmission process. These portrayals assist in acquiring knowledge about cultural practices and can lead individuals to be more careful in choosing a romantic partner. Even though a partner may mention the possibility of getting more than one wife in the future, one would already know that their culture acknowledges polygamy. This would inform the decision to choose that person as a partner

#### **4.2.8 Promoting Notions of Romance in Relationships**

The researcher sought to determine if the themes portrayed in romantic relationships in soap operas are being learned, and even modelled, by young people. It is important to note that individuals “are not born with attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, or even a range of behaviours”; rather, one must learn them through exposure (Tan, 1986:243). “The stories can be perceived of as realistic at an emotional level, rather than at a literal or denotative level” (Morley, 1994: 31). In the case of the participants in this study, the recognition experienced when watching soap operas was one based on their subjective life experiences.

P8: *“Sometimes, as a guy they guide you how you should treat a lady although sometimes they just put too much drama just to attract viewers’ attention. But they really help you know what to do”.*

P10: *"We actually learn a lot from soap operas about relationships, for instance looking at Magongwa's relationship, we learned it's not just women who get abused. Magongwa's wife would humiliate him in front of his colleagues and students and he always felt helpless."*

P2: *"I come from a township, so you do see guys buying flowers and then I learned this is how it's done"*

FM: P3 *"They also guide one in the case whereby you are faced with something and you don't know how to deal with it, one just look back to something similar that happened in a soap opera and then you just use the same strategy"*

P9: *"I learned from soap operas how to plan date. Such things as lighting candles, wearing sexy lingerie and the likes. And that they maintain one's relationship as they are adventurous"*

FM: P6 *"I also learned from soap operas that being spontaneous makes a relationship exciting, otherwise I would still be planning everything with my partner."*

Anderegg (2013) revealed that romantic partners depend on maintaining behaviours to secure their relationships. Shrum (1996) also attested to this when he stated that information audiences are exposed to by soap operas can influence judgements as well as decisions that viewers make in real life. These decisions are aligned with the content shown in soap operas. This was confirmed by participants who illustrated the things they watched on soap operas and applied to their relationships. Wyer and Adaval (2004) wrote that, ideas and knowledge that become easily available in the memory because of media coverage, can affect the interpretation of new information and the implications that are drawn from it. Similarly, O'Guinn and Shrum (1997) found that devoted soap opera audiences have a higher ease of retrieval of soap opera concepts from memory and utilise these heuristically in their building of reality.

Social cognitive theory (SCT) also affirms that individuals learn behaviours because of watching reconciled models (Bandura, 1977, 2001). Viewers may endorse these learned behaviours in their own relationships and expect similar results to those shown on television. Canary and Stafford (1994) noted that maintenance of a relationship is a continuous process.

Without it, relationships are likely to fail. A further study found that men and women at undergraduate level describe watching reality dating programs to acquire facts about dating and romance (Zurbriggen & Morgan, 2006). The same could be said of soap opera viewing by youths. By this, viewers may look to soap operas with the motive of learning. There is evidence that youth can learn about several aspects of their world from television (Hurtz & Durkin, 2004; Dill & Thill, 2007). If audiences can learn about aspects of life from media, they can acquire information regarding intimate relationships from this exposure (Hefner & Wilson, 2013).

Students commented that some people's lives seem to be centred around soap operas. People tend to imitate what they see on television in order to improve and make their own relationships more stimulating. Unfortunately, that's not where it ends, and they sometimes compare their own relationships to those they have seen on soap operas. This can be detrimental. The researcher learned from the data that soap opera portrayals of romantic relationships may have both negative and positive effects on viewers' relationships. People need to watch soap operas with an open mind as some of the things portrayed on television are not realistic and are meant specifically for entertainment purposes. Some aspects of soap operas can, however, be very informative. Although caution and an open mind should be applied soap operas can be seen as having an effect in romantic relationships. The participants of the current study confirmed that they sometimes just randomly fantasize about that fabulous relationship they saw on television and that if only the tables were turned, they could have the chance to be one of those characters for a second. Participants indicated that once someone starts to fantasize and envy other relationships, they could start to feel dissatisfied with their own relationship, causing it to suffer. They attested to have witnessed males who fantasize about girls and romance on soap operas longing to date "wild girls". Should the girls that they date in real life not live up to this "wild girl" image, they start cheating on them. Findings indicate that fantasizing about a relationship from a soap opera sometimes brings dissatisfaction within actual relationships and feelings of neglect partners. This could lead to unfaithful behaviour. Soap opera role models have a significant impact on youthful viewers and the way they navigate real-life relationships.

According to reception theory which is grounded on the interaction between text and the reader (De Kock, 2010), some participants saw these soap operas as presenting more options on how relationships are handled, while others see them as posing threats to their relationships. Some described the world of fantasy as assisting them with problem-solving while others used viewed soap operas as an escape from real life. Respondents also reported being emotionally involved in certain soap operas, and their having a major impact on their relationships. Hobson (1994:167) supported these views by stating that “the process of television communication is recognised as not being complete until it is perceived and understood by the viewer”. Evidently the viewer is realised as an essential part of the meaningful process (De Kock, 2010). As a result, the issues confirmed by many of the respondents were more likely to reflect that the designated genres offered a scope in which they could contribute and feel involved. They felt that issues portrayed in soap operas were applicable to their own lives. They trust that the genres provide an impartial and valued debate within this range. The initial picture is that both men and women convey the same interest in the genre. Liebes and Katz (1990:100) concurred that “people make a primarily referential, rather than critical, reading of the genre, in which ‘viewers relate to characters as real people and in turn relate these real people to their own real world’”. By analysing the acceptance of these soap operas, the manners in which viewers actively place themselves in relation to television texts is evident. Generally, each participant has their own individual view of soap operas and their impact on real life.

#### **4.2.9 Influence on Choice of Partner**

A study by Taylor (2008) discovered that standards used for choosing a partner are biased by symbolic and one’s physical surroundings. According to Taylor (2012), the qualities women find pleasing in prospective partners have been found to be affected by gender ratios in pictures, movie trailers and soap operas. Another study also revealed that watching a soap opera storyline featuring twisted gender ratios affected men’s selectivity for a possible relationship partner (Taylor, 2015).

In many cultures, it is currently common for two people to choose their partner without first obtaining approval from parents or other extended family (Eastwick, 2013) unlike in the past.

Hence it is important for this study to acknowledge students' preferences in regard to choosing partners. Literature has frequently observed if men and women differ in the significance they position in their selection of qualities in a partner (Li & Kenrick, 2006). There is a possibility that soap opera portrayals can have a major impact on our choice of partners. The current study investigates the capacity of romantic soap operas to influence the personalities that students find interesting in potential romantic or sexual partners.

As stated previously, inexperienced undergraduates are more likely to be influenced by these portrayals of what dating is all about and try it to imitate these portrayals. They are in a phase of figuring out what works and what doesn't in relationships. Some people value looks over personality traits and relational skills in a relationship. One study pointed out that media content is able to transform the traits pursued in prospective romantic or sexual partners (Taylor, 2008). In a similar way, some of these individuals will only realise what they value or desire in a partner after watching a certain character on a soap opera. These are a few things students indicated to be important in their wish lists for a potential partner.

#### **4.2.10 Emphasis on Physical Beauty**

A number of studies examining preferred characteristics in a partner have discovered that many people seek partners who are physically good-looking (Buss et al., 2001) and possess aesthetic superiorities (Buss & Barnes, 1986). According to the quoted remarks below it looks as though physical appearance seems to be crucial in a choice of a partner.

FM: P2 *"I need an authoritative guy, I must see a man in him for instance, Kumkani's from Generations the legacy. You can feel his manhood just from the sound of his voice and body structure. Because if man is too sweet I get bored, I need to be submissive".*

FM: P6 *"Oh, well! I do agree on the importance of personality but then my lady should look attractive as well."*

FM: P1 *"And flexible, she should be wild (the guys nodded) and sexually desirable."*

FM: P4 *"Yooh, man, this takes me back to Akona and Nicolas couple. Akona was not such a beautiful girl but her body was on point and her personality was marvellous."*

*Brains and attractiveness that's a good combination in a partner. I still remember this other time she was wearing a mini skirt"*

FM: P1 *"Some of us actually started following generations around that time"*

FM: P3 *"And then there was Muvhango with Matshediso, Thuli and Nonny characters. Those ladies! I actually couldn't wait to come to KZN hoping to see this beauty in person."*

It is evident from the comments that men prefer physical beauty in potential mates to unattractive women. The physical appeal of a potential sentimental companion is critical for men and women and appears to assume a primary part in companion decision (Buss, 1989). Literature demonstrated that the significance of physical appeal in relationships has been analysed from various points of view yet is best comprehended from theories derived from evolutionary psychology. For instance, in one study (Arrowsmith, 2016) discovered that in many cases men only responded with physical descriptions of potential partners when asked. Evidence from the data also showed that men value looks in women. Literature reviewed articulated that female physique is of specific significance when men ascertain the physical appeal of women (Singh, 1993, 1994, 1995). As stated by students one actually realises the type of partner they prefer by watching television.

FM: P2 *"Well, we also like our men physically attractive. He should be tall with broad shoulders and chest."* (Covering her face with her hands)

P10 *"A man should look attractive, someone I can proudly go to the mall with"*

FM: P2 *"Definitely! I should feel safe with him, he should possess those masculinity features. Men like Kumkani (Gadaffi), Sakhile by just looking at their bodies you one feels a need to submit"*

FYP: P1 *"All I know is I'm allergic to short guys. Imagine dating a guy like Jama, short and skinny. No!"* (Laughing)

These comments attest that women may crave a physique that communicates information about a man's authority in the form of strength and security. Just as researchers Hughes and Gallup (2003), Swami and Tovee (2005) found that a physique with broad shoulders and a thin waist and hips will be highly desired by women. It also became clear that from a socio-cultural

standpoint, most cultures favour female beauty over male physical appeal (Hughes & Gallup, 2003; Swami & Tovee, 2005).

*FSW: P7 “What I have realized from our conversations as men, is that the first step in initiating a relationship is by just starting a conversation with a random attractive stranger. When we first meet an attractive girl, we don’t really know each other, yet one feels attracted to that beauty”*

The fact that people tend to approach strangers due to their physical appearance has been pointed out as one of the triggers that forces one to want to start a relationship with someone. For instance, a number of authors stated that individuals describe more interest in starting romantic relationships with good-looking targets than to ugly targets (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). This enthusiasm to link with physically attractive potential partners is also apparent in behaviour. Garcia et al., (1991) supported these observations by stating that initiating conversations with attractive individuals is a key first step in relationship formation. In progressing romantic relationships, individuals convey better satisfaction (Peterson & Miller, 1980) and additional passion love, intimacy and dedication (Sangrador & Yela, 2000) when their partners are physically good-looking. Such results indicate that viewers not only see beautiful people as having desirable interpersonal attributes but are interested in connecting with beautiful individuals (Langlois et al., 2000).

#### **4.2.11 The Role of Personality Traits**

Participants showed that personality characteristics influence choice of partners and are significant factors in establishing and maintaining intimate relationships. Prager (1995) stated that personality features seem to be particularly important in partner selection. Similarly, various studies have found that people have a habit of selecting partners with similar personality characteristics (Tyler, 1988; Frost, 2011; Menges, 2016) and an exciting personality (Buss & Barnes, 1986).

*P6: “I need someone with a bubbly personality.”*

FYP: P5 *“I want a man who can make me laugh, he should be funny and outgoing. Have time to joke and be lovey dovelly. Imagine dating a serious guy and you end up feeling like an 80 years old couple.” (They laughed).*

FYP: P1 *“Bruh! Nothing beats dating a funny person”*

*“Imagine dating someone who is always serious and has no time to fool around. It makes a relationship boring.”*

P2: *“We should at least have something in common. This way it’s easier to click and understand each other. And it makes a relationship more interesting.”*

Findings were that, according to students, a person’s personality has a huge impact on the progression of a relationship. Should the personality be “bad”, the relationship is already perceived to be destined for failure. This is supported by the literature where research by Regan and the colleagues show that for decades, scholars from different disciplines have been interested in traits individuals’ desire in a romantic partner, in part because such preferences have an implication for people’s behaviour and their interpersonal relationships (Regan et al., 2001). This is a norm in everyday life, each individual have preferred personality that they wish for in their partner unlike in the accident days whereby parents would choose a partner for their children based on the family background and wealth.

#### **4.2.12 Intelligence**

Buss (1985, 1989), cited in Figueredo, Sefcek and Jones (2006) discovered that one of the crucial features sought after in a romantic partner by both men and women was “intelligence”. Aspara et al., (2018) also attested that when it came to picking a male partner, the smarter one is the best choice. Aspara and colleagues further noted that intelligence could have a direct effect on the suitability of marital partners and the indirect effect of the ability of smarter men to make larger incomes (Aspara et al., 2018). For instance, Paulhus (2000) and Sternberg (2000) cited in Hoffner and Buchanan (2005) indicated that intelligence is connected with various positive features such as social competence, problem-solving skills and achievements.

FYP: P5 *“For me personality is everything. I need an ambitious, intelligent guy. Why would I be with someone who can’t even challenge me? I mean there should be a flow in our conversation”*

FYP: P3 *“Yeah, he should have a plan”*

FYP: P1 *“Yes! Look at Tshidi Phakade from generations the legacy, I admire her choice of partners, she doesn’t settle for less. Always going for men with a plan.”*

P10 *“I love intelligent men. A man who can come up with a plan when life gets rough”*

These comments were supported by Dijkstra and colleagues who found that women, more than men, preferred an intelligent partner. This is in line with evolutionary psychological reasoning that intelligence is an essential for a bright future (Dijkstra et al., 2012). These authors established the fact that women also emphasise the importance of a partner’s earning capacity seems to further support this line of reasoning (Dijkstra et al., 2012).

P6: *“There is something special about an intelligent a man. Someone with a bright future. What will I do with someone who is not sure if he is moving backwards or forward?”*

FSW: P4 *“An attractive lady is desirable but for me beauty with brains is a bonus.”*

P7: *“I love smart ladies. Someone I can confide in and she is just not there staring at me clueless. Someone who will encourage me, empower me and lastly support me.”*

P8 *“I prefer my lady with brains, these slay queens are so ignorant.”*

Majority of the research participants from both genders indicated that a relationship is more fulfilling with an intelligent and ambitious partner. They strongly believe that for a relationship to evolve smoothly, both partners ought to have almost the same intellectual capacity as they will each be able to think critically towards the future of the relationship. Furthermore, this enables a conducive platform for supporting, empowering and developing each other. According to their statements, a partner who is able to impact your life positively, someone from whom you learn new things, who shapes your character and continuously encourage you to be a better person is an ingredient to a fascinating and healthy relationship. Intelligence is often linked to good communication and understanding. In addition, when the

level of intelligence is almost the same, communication also overflow and the level of understanding becomes much better.

#### **4.2.13 Earning Capacity**

Students indicated consistently providing for women's upkeep and entertainment was a challenge. It appeared that they experienced financial constraints trying to impress their partners, as women seem to be more attracted to wealth in a man among other factors. As Cashdan (1996) put it, a woman will try to charm rich, high-profile men who are keen and capable of helping them. According to women in general, a wealthy man is the best bet (Cashdan, 1996) in a romantic relationship.

*P9: I like my man financially stable. He should afford me."*

*FSW: P1 "Sometimes as gents we try hard to keep up with relationships on soap operas to satisfy our women but it's not easy. We just can't keep up the consistency of entertaining them. For instance, Sakhile would take Mbali-Enhle to fancy restaurants for dinner every day. We are just students, you can't do that in two consecutive days otherwise you will sleep on an empty stomach for the whole month" They laughed*

*FSW: P6 "And the problem is our sisters don't understand that"*

*FSW: P8 "Ha-ha, it's tough out there, some of us save up from the beginning of the year to make her birthday which will be in September special"*

*FSW: P4 "They need to appreciate our efforts and forget about Jama"*

*FSW: P3 "Oh yes! Our sisters need to understand that we can only afford to take them out once in a while on special occasions like her birthday and anniversaries. But problem is we are only students, if I was able to take her out last month on her birthday, I might be broke on Valentine's Day."*

Male participants felt soap operas expose women to ideas of dating wealthy men who can afford to take them out on fancy dates regularly. This puts them under pressure as they feel obliged to conform to their women's expectations. This is very hard on them as they are still students themselves and cannot afford to eat out frequently. They therefore urge their ladies to understand their predicament. Students make reference to soap operas where couples

always eat out on restaurants, and men ought to pay for bills. Male participants indicated that this can be challenging as they are students and cannot afford to maintain the standard to which women are being maintained on soap operas.

FM: P2 *"He should afford his bills and be able to spoil me."*

FM: P2 *"Oh well! Consistency is very important in a relationship, you can't take your girlfriend out on dinner for the first few months of your dating and just stop."*

FM: P5 *"Yes, it will only make me suspicious, maybe there is somebody else in the picture."*

FM: P6 *"If I'm used to being taken out on fancy restaurants, that's what I expect from my next boyfriend. Inconsistency can bring luck of interest. You need to keep up the pace brother."*

FM: P1 *"Will you stop comparing us, we are different individuals and our financial situations differ. You can't expect things to remain the same."*

FM: P6 *"We understand you are different but you can't expect me to drop the standard. Remember Mbali-Enhle after her break up with Sakhile she just couldn't understand how Tbos lives on R1500 as his monthly allowance."*

FM: P2 *"It's only natural."* laughing

FM: P6 *"We need financially stable guys. At least it's an assurance should a relationship lead to something serious in future I know you are capable of taking care of me."*

FM: P2 *"A broke man is a big NO, shame!"* (Ladies nodding and laughing)

This was supported by Buss's cross-cultural questionnaire research of 37 communities which revealed that women placed a higher value on the financial projections of a potential partner than men did (Buss, 1989 in Cashdan, 1996). Further, some female student participants emphasised the importance of a man's earning capacity. They claimed the transition from a man who is financially-stable to settling for a 'broke' man as being very stressful. This relates to the finding that women are inclined to rank earning prospects when looking for a long-term partner as compared with a short-term partner (Li & Kenrick, 2006), while men prefer

physical attractiveness above anything (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008). Evidently, when evaluating the comparative proportions of comments made around the various characteristics of the values in a partner, some fascinating differences between men and women appeared. Generally, one could say that women were more concerned about the earning capacity of their partners, while men were more concerned about the physical beauty of their partners. Students revealed that soap operas do have an influence, no matter how unrealistic they may appear.

#### **4.2.14 Relational Skills-Support, Kindness and Affection**

Various studies have surveyed relative predilections in the personality traits of prospective romantic partners. For instance, in a study by Buss and Barnes, (1986 in Figueredo et al., 2006) the following was found: “good companion, considerate, honest, dependable, kind, understanding, interesting to talk to, and loyalty are highly valued characteristics in a partner”.

Osgood et al. (2010) also affirmed that the expression and value of helpful relationships has a large influence on whether or not people become prosperous and independent adults. The significance of relationships where individuals can regularly extend forms of help and support is well documented in the literature on social support (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998; Werner & Smith, 1992), and positive youth development (Leffert et al., 1998). Arrowsmith (2014) also conducted a study on men’s opinions of female authority in dating relationships. He found that regardless of having vague feelings about women’s emotions in relation to themselves, men expressed an appreciation of women’s emotional support. Supportive relationship is related to positive results in many life domains. This is what participants said with regards to this issue:

*FSW: P2 “Having a supportive partner is everything”*

*FSW: P4 “Yeah, having a supportive woman can actually boost a man’s confidence”*

*FSW: P7 “It also makes your love grow stronger every day. For instance Sibahle and Ayanda from Uzalo, Sibahle was a prostitute and was not a religious person when she first came to Kwamashu but she supported Ayanda through everything and ended up*

*joining the church. She believed in him until the poor guy ended up believing in himself. That's the kind of a woman one needs in his life."*

FSW: P4 *"Yes! And Smangele, I guess Ayanda was the lucky guy. He even thought he was in love with Smangele just because she was always there for him"*

FSW: P8 *"Having someone who believes in you and your dreams is worth keeping."*

According to the research participants, someone who's willing to push you and encourage you to be your best self and who truly cares about your well-being indicates a partner that loves you a lot.

Gottlieb (1983) emphasised that social support can be offered in the setting of both informal and formal relationships. According to Gottlieb (1983: 28), "social support entails of verbal and/or nonverbal information or advice, tangible aid or action that is tendered by social intimates or inferred by their presence and has beneficial emotional or behavioural effects on the recipient". Social support is usually referred to as, relations with others that provides the receiver with emotional support, encouragement, appraisal of the situation, and tangible help for others (Vaux, 1988). Certainly, social support displays an extended list of advantages (Ben-Zur, 2009; Lundberg et al., 2008, Feeney & Collins, 2015) adding to happiness and satisfaction with life.

It is obvious that support is crucial in a relationship. It can encourage another person whenever they feel deserted. Knowing that one is not alone in a situation, no matter how difficult, can allow one to re-gain their strength or follow their dreams. For instance we have seen Tau from *Generations the Legacy* asking his girlfriend Zitha to be by his side during the press conference while trying to clear his name of murder accusations. No matter how much Zitha was victimized by other women who were against her supporting her man, Tau did not seem to worry about dragging Zitha into the matter. All he ever wanted was a supportive partner. So, all in all having someone in your corner helps individuals to develop or achieve what they are longing for. Besides, people go through trials and tribulations as well as going through daily life stresses, so if one has a partner who is willing to be supportive and lift you up when you feel down, that's a blessing. Soap operas assist youths to choose from many

character traits portrayed on television and to determine what kind of a partner is preferred. Under the same issue on relational skills, the element of affection was brought up.

P1: *"I like a caring, loving guy. He should take me out and spoil me and show affection."*

FYP: P6 *"Shower me with hugs and kisses for no reason, hold hands on the street, you know! Just someone who is not afraid to expresses his affection."*

Some female students indicated that they preferred men who would do anything possible to sweep them off their feet. These findings are supported by studies on sex differences which have revealed that men have a habit of focussing on physical appeal, while women tend to focus on personal features such as kindness, love and consideration (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986). Seeing men on television who do anything in their power to keep their women happy can be fascinating. That is, every women's dream is to be treated like a queen. Men usually change from treating their women well in the beginning of the relationship to stopping this once they become comfortable with each other. Should he continue good treatment throughout the course of the relationship, students maintained that he is definitely for keeps.

FYP: P5 *"I love my man kind, with a sense of humour. Not the kind of man who just use girls until you feel that you are being used"*

FYP: P1 *"Yes, some men tend to be after sex and ditch you right after getting what they wanted. That's inconsiderate"*

From the above comments, some female students indicated that they prefer a compassionate partner, who cares about their feelings and well-being.

#### **4.3 CONCLUSION**

It is obvious from the responses of the students and the literature reviewed that both men and women favour intelligent, supportive partners who are attractive and possess a good or exciting personality. Men are more attracted to physical appearance than women. In line with reception theory which according to Allen (1992) identifies the definition of a television programme as something that is generated through the act of watching, instead of something that is objectively intrinsic to the text, it was evident from viewers' responses that the portrayal of romantic relationships have an influence on their choices of partners. It was

revealed that the more viewers watch these soap operas they gain different options about what they considered to have a positive or negative influence on their choices. Hence different preferences were raised when it came to the choice of a partner.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: THE INFLUENCE OF SOAP OPERAS ON STUDENTS GENDER ROLES AND SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter serves to continue the presentation and discussion of data collected from the focus groups and interviews with the students. It focuses on the influence of soap operas on students' gender roles and sexual expectations. As Ward (2002) indicated, media may portray impracticable and twisted experiences of human romance and sexuality with their formulaic depiction of gender roles and sexuality, in developing and sustaining stereotypical gender-role schemas.

### **5.2 The Impact of Soap Operas on Gender Roles**

Mhlongo (2013: 15) pointed out that "as the world is socially constructed, so too are gender roles and beliefs about relationships. The roles, beliefs and attitude towards relationships are also influenced by the ways in which people have been taught and learned to view certain issues". This may include what people learn from different settings. Additionally, the portrayal of gendered roles in media is thought to be major contributing factor to what is learned. What individuals have been taught and are familiar with concerning gender roles and relationships can be expressed and strengthened by media portrayals.

It is commonly agreed in the literature that when it comes to mass media, television and films are the domain of sexist communities and that they often offer a prejudiced and stereotyped representation of women's roles (Ceulemans & Fauconnier, 2015). In agreement with Ceulemans and Fauconnier (2015) opined that television normally represents highly-stereotyped views of male and particularly female roles. Some researchers defined gender stereotypes as "beliefs about the psychological traits that are characteristics of each sex, while gender roles represent beliefs about the behaviours that are appropriate for members of each sex" (Eagly et al., 2000; Kite et al., 2008; Wood & Eagly, 2010 in Powell, 2012: 120). In support of this, Richmond-Abott (1992) also indicated that gender-role stereotyping originates from the perception society tends to have about a particular gender group and the subsequent attitude it has regarding the activities associated with this group. Participants in

this study expressed how the portrayal of stereotypical images of both males and females on television affect their own romantic relationships. Their responses were as follows:

FYP: P3 *“On Skeem Saam, Meiki and Mokhali work at the supermarkets while their partners work as professionals (Leeto as a lawyer, while John is a professor). So besides what we grew up knowing, I feel like media is trying by all means to reinforce the idea that men are smarter than women”.*

FYP: P6 *“I feel like media and culture channelled us into thinking men are more intelligent, that’s why when we get to college most women major with things like humanities while men choose to be scientists. If they could be careful of their portrayals women would also be aware of their potentials.”*

FYP: P4 *“It gets worse where after work, Mokhali and Meiki will start preparing dinner while Leeto and his father will either go jogging or lay down a bit. Their portrayals fill our boyfriends’ heads with ideas. Hence they expect us (girlfriends) to be cooking after lectures and they would come over for dinner then go back to reading. I mean what do they take us for (furious). Are we not both students? Now it looks like his studies are more important than mine. That’s what I personally mostly fight with my partner about.”*

Group: (Nodding)

FYP: P4 *“And if you try to show him they get offended. I remember my friend used to date this guy whom they will only meet upon his request. If it’s the girl who wants to meet up he will start making excuses about school work and even go beyond that by reminding her his is studying statistics not Arts like her. He continuously undermined his girlfriend’s programme.”*

FYP: P3 *“Those are the very same things that made us break up with my boyfriend because his time seemed to be more precious. Like he is the only one who is here to study, I’m just on standby waiting for him to come over to my house regardless of what I’m busy with. I should just put everything on hold for him. So we would argue at all times.”*

At this stage women in one focus group seemed to be blaming soap operas for their portrayals of men as smarter and women as caregivers. The participants blamed these portrayals for their boyfriends taking advantage of them and fighting with them whenever they tried to change their mentality. As suggested that “the ways that the characters on television are stereotyped should be brought to the attention of writers and producers, because it is only when they understand the implications of what they are doing that they can make an effort to minimise these portrayals” (Baker & Raney 2007: 39).

Another student responded:

FYP: P1 *“Right there you see if we have had proper upbringing we would know that women are as smart and capable as much.”*

Unlike everyone else who blamed media for their stereotypical portrayals of gender roles, this particular student held their family accountable for this behaviour. This is indeed relevant as when we grow up our parents are already sharing responsibilities amongst the siblings. Domestic work is regarded as a woman’s job and many of our fathers worked in mines. This issues gets even worse in the case where the male child is home the whole day while all females are out running errands or house chores. They come back home exhausted and need to cook and clean while the male child is watching television. A dangerous precedent is set by this for our youth as many modern-day women believe in collective effort or shared responsibilities. Hence if one partner is not helping out there will be clashes in that relationship.

Sehlabi (2012) supported the fact that soap operas portray stereotypical images of both genders. For instance, men have always been seen as protectors and providers in many societies, meaning women are not fit to provide for themselves and are seen as mere house wives who’s roles include child bearing and rearing (Sehlabi, 2012). These aspects are frequently belittling and portray women as being entirely dependent on men, which leads to stereotyping that manifests itself in media programmes such as *Generations the Legacy*, *Skeem Saam*, *Uzalo* and *Muvhango*.

Students also brought up the issue of women who are constantly characterised as emotional beings. Likewise, Gunter (1986) protested that women are commonly belittled as people who are too emotional to handle anything important on their own, without the involvement and backing of men. "The emotional woman is believed to become flustered in the most minor crisis; she is seen as sensitive, often fearful and anxious, and generally dependent on male help and support in all kinds of personal and professional situations" (Gunter 1986: 11).

Participants' observations were as follows:

FYP: P5 *"The worst part is whenever one tries to reason with them regarding their behaviour, they don't listen until you are furious. Then they start saying we are emotional about everything."*

FYP: P2 *"You see right there that's what I hate most. Media should stop labelling us, like we are crazy, because these men use this kind of things against us."*

FYP: P4 *"Yeah, such statements as we allow our emotions control us hence we make incompetent decisions."*

Thus according to women participants, it seems as though soap opera portrayals label them as weak, emotional and incapable of making independent decisions. It is as if women need men to come to their rescue at all times. This shallow description of women in media is a serious concern. Haque and colleagues (2011) indicated that decision-making has been a vital concern of many previous studies on women and their independence. It is usually alleged that economic empowerment and stringent legal tools have important parts to play in challenging social inequalities and differences. Economic wealth is imperative in guaranteeing basic needs and opportunities for all citizens including men and women. It is also assumed that greater participation in daily decision-making will position ladies in a superior status and enable them to have an impact on the control of family assets. Further, women's flexibility of physical movement away home may have fundamental ramifications for information coverage, advancement in interpersonal skills, increased self-assurance and opportunities to act independently (Haque et al., 2011).

FYP: P3 *“Hmm! This reminds me of Tshidi Phakade, story who took control over her husband company Hashtag World after Kumkani was found guilty of murder charges. Under the management of Tshidi, clients started pulling out of deals because they believed as a woman Tshidi is incapable of running a big company. That’s when Tshidi became frustrated because she was obviously not coping so she had to ask her brother Tau for assistance. She would even sleep with the clients in order to seal a deal.”*

This feedback confirms Powell’s statement that whenever people state their preference for a boss, they still favour a male manager over a female manager (Powell, 2012; Powell & Butterfield, 2015). Simmons (2001) also attested to this finding by stating that in many studies, respondents have steadily conveyed a preference for a male boss. It is therefore clear that a boss lady is hardly accepted in many societies.

Regardless of portrayals of successful women on soap operas to encourage female viewers, the display of the same woman as weak and emotional still persists. This action makes it evident that being a breadwinner and protector is perceived to be traditionally masculine activity, therefore a working woman is assumed to need her male partner for assistance. It is also clear that being educated have an impact on woman’s independence, however that independence is still restricted in many African cultures.

FYP:P1 *“The same thing happened to Cathy when she wanted to start her own company and she could not seal any deal as everyone feels like although she has experience, they don’t trust her to handle their accounts. We saw Cathy emotionally disturbed she had to beg her brother to do some posters just to be underpaid. It looks like soap operas always portray women as emotional beings who need to be saved by men. Which is quite unfair.”*

FYP: P4 *“Look at Nandi, Jack Mabaso’s wife. She is alleged to be too emotional. The family keeps everything from Nandi since they believe she is not strong enough to handle the truth. They assume she will have emotional break down. Even Kumkani*

*used her to fight his battle with Mabaso, he knew Nandi's weakest point. Mabaso even denied Nandi to go into the corporate world due to her emotions."*

*"These are the kinds of portrayals that make men think they are smarter than us."*

Students pointed out these examples as one of the things that reinforce men's mentality of protectors, providers and as being the smarter sex. It was clear that they see themselves through the lens of soap opera portrayals. This is what causes tension in students' relationships because both male and females are fighting for equal power. Women want their boyfriends to see them as their partners and not just some women who need to be saved.

Students maintained that there is a lot of stereotypical portrayal of gender roles in soap operas.

FM: P4 *"The main problem with media is that they belittle women, I mean there is more to them than just beauty. There are smart women, the kind you need in your life to help you prosper."*

FM: P1 *"Exactly! Soap operas, give people the wrong impression about women as supportive, I mean we also need the support from our partners. We got dreams, brains and plans. We are not only here to support them. For instance, look at KK and Matshediso's relationship, KK is forcing Matshediso to be a house wife and denying her the right to work. He literally brought her to take care of Mudi his son. Likewise, I'm expecting my girlfriend to understand my studies comes first. Then I'll check upon her later when I'm done"*

Similarly, male students complained of not getting enough support from their girlfriends if they don't conform to their schedules of spending time together. This subject of gender stereotyping and misrepresentation in the media needs consideration because individuals tend to copy what they see in the media without reflecting and this strengthens particular stereotypes. According to Curran, "their [media] mediations determine what gains prominence and what recedes into the background, what is included and what is excluded" (Curran 2002: 163). As such the media depicts behaviour that can be imitated by the audience. This view is supported by De Fleur and Dennis, who suggested that "members of an audience

may imitate or reproduce behaviour they find modelled in media sources” (De Fleur & Dennis 1998: 470). Sharing this concern, Baker and Raney cautioned that “when individuals view televised portrayal as statements about how everyone should look and behave, then misrepresentations of different people and groups will continue to hinder our society” (Baker & Raney 2007: 39). Ogunleye echoed the same sentiments by arguing that through such stereotypical portrayal, television and films reinforce the negative socialization of women: “If a female, a girl child, in particular, sees herself portrayed in such negative stereotypes on a consistent basis, she begins to believe that the filmic image is the appropriate portrayal” (Ogunleye 2005: 132).

An example of this would be if a female student sees herself as a domestic worker, she might end up playing the “wife role” to her boyfriend - to cook and clean for him while he is busy studying. At the end of the day she fails her studies and may start blaming the boyfriend, consequently affecting their relationship. Initially students found that soap opera portrayals were quite unfair, especially with regard to their portrayals of females. Participants in the study who were boyfriends expected much from their girlfriends and reported that relationships became vulnerable when these expectations - especially with regards to preparing meals and fitting in with their schedules, were not met.

### **5.2.1 Conforming to Traditional Gender Roles**

Gender roles have performed significant impacts on communities for a long time. Hindered from both the physical constraints between men and women and the mental concepts enforced by society and religion, gender roles have defined what it means to be a man or a woman, masculine or feminine (Connell, 2014). Traditional gender roles are usually distinguished by inequality in the middle of what is permissible and anticipated of women and men. Gender roles aid in expressing a society’s anticipations of men and women (Ickes, 1993). They can be distinguished in a society by investigating the gap between what is acceptable for men and women. For Ortner (1974), culture includes beliefs, traditions and/or rituals that come to define individuals and/or communal values and people’s ways of life. What needs to be understood is that cultural beliefs may not be entirely bad, but it is the representative construction by which people assess and allocate gender identities that may be problematic. Women, for instance, are linked with nurturing roles because of their reproductive capacities,

whilst men are linked with authoritative functions such as being the head of the house and the decision-maker.

In an interview participants indicated that:

FM: P6 *"I feel like soap operas are indirectly enforcing the traditional gender role of men being heads of the family and women as good for childbearing. For instance, Tau from generations the legacy went to the extent of going behind his wife's back to have kids. This means he denied Karabo the right of consenting to being a mother. This makes one to wonder if that's all we are good for."*

FM: P2 *"And Tau was probably going to expect Karabo to leave her career to be a mother. That's what usually happens to most of women, especial in the case of South Africa where there are so many single mothers at the early age. Their boyfriends left them to raise the kids alone. That's what actually soap operas are instilling in men's heads."*

FM: P3 *"There is nothing wrong with that, these soap operas still insist on the man as a provider. Even if we are both students, my girlfriend still expects me to take care of the bill every time we eat out."* (They laughed)

FM: P4 *"She just dress up and fold her arms when it's time to pay and as a men you automatically know it's your responsibility"*

This way of viewing culture sustains what has been argued by Eduards (1971:1), as cited in Herve (2010) who defined culture as that "complex whole, that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by a human being as a member of society". Stephen and Phillips (2005), while defining the relationship between culture and sexuality, argued that culture regulates sexuality, particularly within a patriarchal society where men benefit from sexual relationships with females. In a gendered context, "culture controls human sexuality in a cultural environment where women are expected to be sexually dormant and where sex within marriage is legally defined as a man's right" (Penny, 2006:8).

Responses in this regard included the following:

P4: *“Soap operas betray our beliefs about women. For instance they make us believe women are men’s sex toys, that it’s their duty to bear children. But then if you watch Skeem Saam, we are aware Leeto is ready to have kids but Mokhali his wife on the other side is so much against the idea.”*

P9: *“I do like the way Mpho one of the Chief’s wives handled the issue of children bearing. Regardless of how everyone respect and fear the chief and how everyone obeys his orders Mpho was very frank with him while she declined the idea of having kids. She made it clear that she is not ready to sacrifice her career by being a mother. She will only have kids when she is ready. I must say I was impressed by this portrayal by Muvhango, I feel like they empowered a lot of women with these episodes. Well, I for one felt empowered. Now women know they are just not good for childbearing.”*

FM: P2 *“Generation legacy has portrayed men as superior, like these elderly men forced Sphesihle to get married to Mazwi and they don’t really care about her feelings. She is just a property to the Moroka’s to give them an heir. Actually, culture and media are working together to continue with the oppression of women.”*

FM: P4 *“It’s so sad. They make it as if men are these bad people, like monsters. I mean some are horrible but they make it appear as if we are all bad people. Some of us love and respect or women.”*

Both men and women reported seeing soap operas as displaying traditional gender roles and that these portrayals seem to be imposing ideas on students. Female students reported feeling pressured at times to cook for their boyfriends and do their laundry, while male respondents reported feeling expected to spend on their girlfriends, as they are automatically seen as the “provider”. As far as students are concerned, these expectations put strain on their relationships as they are here to study not necessarily to date. The research participants of the current study reasons that portrayals of traditional gender roles on soap operas are dangerous - particularly for those students who are less experienced in dating. Thus they might assume that’s the only way and end up being “slaves” to their partners. Besides from media, some of the gender roles are practiced in our respective homes, which makes it easier to incorporate in one’s relationship after witnessing them from soap operas. The major problem arises when these inexperienced students become aware there are other

alternatives as some of their partners become violent towards them. As Dyer observed, associations depiction and stereotyping by affirming that “how we are seen determines in part how we are treated, how we treat others is based on how we see us; such view comes from representation” (Dyer, 1993:1). It is clear then that depiction does not work in seclusion, but the notion is: how individuals from society see themselves, how they are seen and even treated by others is resolved to a great extent by the prevailing press, and this incorporates television (Newbold *et al.* 2002:260).

### 5.2.2 Engaging Transactional Relationships (blessers-blessee)

Students also indicated that soap operas may unintentionally encourage the idea of transactional relationships. There is an ongoing debate on the definition of transactional sex. Wamoyi *et al.*, (2010) cited in Eller (2016) defined transactional sex as the exchange of money or gifts for sexual relations. Similarly, Ranganathan *et al.*, (2016:1) defined it as “a non-marital sexual relationship where women exchange sex for, or in anticipation of, material possessions or favours (such as money, clothing, transportation and school fees)”.

This is what was obtained from the extracts:

FM: P6 *“Television portrayal can be irritating especially when it comes to women. They always portray women as sex objects or victims of rape. Aren’t these portrayals providing ideas for men? For instance, the Xolelwa incident whereby she could not afford to pay for rent, and she was offered a job a waitress but she declined the job offer instead took the shortcut and found herself a blesser. It was really annoying, it makes us women appear as if we cannot do things for ourselves we would rather trade our bodies to get what we want”*

FM: P2 *“Well, I can’t really say portrayal of blessers is entirely wrong. If you look at it from another angle for once women gain something from the relationships unlike back then when guys will just use us for sex then ditch us for another girl. At least with blesser you don’t have to stress over boyfriend, financial needs and academic studies.”*

Authors noted that young women often date multiple sexual partners as a way of improving economic security with no aim of wedding them, but regard them as a way to reach their

economic and social goals (Gage & Bledsoe 1994; Meekers & Calves 1997; Gage 1998; Nyanzi et al. 2000; Machel, 2001; Silberschmidt & Rasch, 2001; Hallman 2004; Luke 2005 in Hawkins et al., 2009). This further relates to a report by Kaufma and Stavrou, (2004) in which girls and sometimes boys were found to prefer partners who could economically support them. Similarly, Nnko and Pool (1997) in their research in Tanzania revealed that cash and gifts are very significant in sexual relationships among young people, and sex does not take place without an economic exchange of some sort. This was a very interesting subject - especially among the mixed gender focus group. Many of the respondents in this group engaged in the discussion.

FM: P1 *“Hence they kill you if don’t conform. Does this mean women value money over their lives?”*

This portrayal seems to be affecting students’ relationships as was mentioned in the previous comments. Students complained that their girlfriends leave them for older men as they are not financially stable. This appears to be common of late as women seem to be serious about getting something out of the relationship as they have always been used or exploited. According to the feedback, relationships are not based purely on love but are used as a form of business transaction. According to female respondents, they are made to feel like easy targets because of these transactional relationship portrayals.

FM: P6 *“Exactly! Television portrayals make us easy targets. Men believe they can just offer you few bucks to sleep with you. They even lose respect for women, even their approach says it all that women can do anything for money. I think it’s time producers of soap operas re-think their approach when they talk about women. Some of us are capable of making our own money”*

It is important that women are not portrayed merely as victims of men at all times. Students explained that these portrayals may be accepted by an experienced man who is simply interested in a girl, but the media encourages him to throw gifts or money at girls in order to get what they want. This is morally unacceptable and degrades females’ images.

### 5.2.3 Encouraging Infidelity- Love Triangles

Participants reported extensive portrayals of infidelity on soap operas which might not be healthy to their own relationships since these portrayals may inadvertently encourage viewers to consider cheating on their partners. It was discovered during their comments that no one amongst the respondents seems to think portrayals of infidelity could be intentionally encouraging it or attempting to educate people on how to avoid partners cheating. Instead they see infidelity portrayals as a threat to their own relationships.

FYP: 6 *“What is it with so many love triangles in soap operas, it feels like soap operas are now condoning this behaviour.”*

FYP: P4 *“The worse part they are just calmly resolved and move on as if it never happened.”*

FYP: P1 *“Yeah! Soap operas have been enforcing this love triangle thing, they make it appear as if it’s acceptable for a man to cheat and a woman has to tolerate it. But then it’s just acting it would be boring if they don’t bring in such aspects. Besides, those things do happen in everyday live.”*

FYP: P5 *“Soap operas still maintain a tradition assumed role by men that they are allowed to have as many romantic partners as they can. I mean look at these love triangles on television. For instance, Uzalo its Ayanda, Smangele and Sibahle (Generations the legacy) Mazwi, Nolwazi and Sphesihle; (Muvhango) Ranthumeng, Thandaza and Imani; (Skeem Saam) Mangaliso, Lelo and Elizabeth. I mean it looks like this love triangle thing is being encouraged by soap operas. And if it was a woman involved in these love triangle, she would be called names such as slut and the likes.”*

Irrespective of its foundation, participants revealed that infidelity is always resolved mostly in peaceful manners through conversations between couples. Media makes it a norm to portray love triangles and this might promote societal tolerance for the violation of traditional values governing romantic relationships. Broadly, these love triangles seem to more frequently portray a man having more than one partner than a woman cheating on her partner. This is similar to the African Traditional Model practice whereby a man is permitted to marry more than one wife (polygamy) while a woman cannot get married to more than

one man. This is no different from an example made by participants that it is a norm on campus for one man to impregnate more than one women at the same time. It is also common for two or more women fight over one man. So basically, according to soap operas it is natural for men to cheat and expect their women to just forgive and forget.

#### **5.2.4 Women's Economic Empowerment as a Factor in Relationship**

One of the participants talked about the notion of social class or women's economic empowerment and how it challenges "subordination and oppression of women in a romantic relationship". "Intimate relationships are the most salient loci for experiencing power relations, yet they have often been overlooked by research on the role of education in fostering women's empowerment" (Murphy-Graham, 2010:321). Hence being successful and independent has been sought to empower women to negotiate and impact the environment of the relationship and the decisions made within it. In other words, according Murphy-Graham (2010), educated and successful women have more power to challenge oppression and make their own decisions in their relationships than dependent women do.

Students also explained that class plays a crucial role in the portrayal of women:

FM: P1 *"But then I think media have improved in their representation of women, we see strong women like Karabo Moroka from generations the legacy, Thandaza from Muvhango they are strong independent women, they refuse to be oppressed by men."*

FM: P6 *"well, class in a way lift up the image of women but partly, because if one could pay attention you'll realise that regardless of the fact that Thandaza is a successful CEO of her own company, her husband Ranthumeng still cheated on her with two women while they were still married . And irrespective of the fact that Thandaza had everything, she still suffered emotional and mental breakdown. These kind of portrays are really dangerous to the young generation."*

FYP: P2 *"Absolutely! They kind of make us look down on ourselves as women. Look at Sphesihle from generations the legacy, firstly she was forced into an arranged marriage and she was so desperate for Mazwi to fall in-love with her regardless the fact that she is a doctor while Mazwi is just a farm boy who just happened to be born*

*from a rich family but he lacks the fancy education Sphesihle had. Why do they always portray women as desperate for love and attention because women end up internalizing this tendencies? It's really sad."*

Basically, according to the participants soap operas portrayal of a successful woman encourages women to see themselves beyond the lens of traditional gender roles as a mother, a sister and a wife but as successful women.

FYP: P6 *"I admire Karabo, just the way she handled 'polyandry' issue. This shows that when a woman is financially independent, in control and have class regardless of being a woman tables can turn. I mean, Karabo convinced elderly men to take the second husband."*

FYP: P5 *"As well as her so-called criminal and manipulative husband"*

Even if they are not completely weak within relationships, most writers agree that once the lobola or monies and gifts are swapped in relationships, women lose much of their authority to take charge of their sexual and reproductive life to their partners, (Blanc, 2001; Blanc & Wolff, 2001; Mantell et al., 2006; Nyanzi et al., 2005). This is however different for educated women or financially-independent women in their relationships. They may hold a higher position in their household and are less vulnerable to subordination and oppression. Equally, this may test the established state of affairs and power stability with their partners (Murphy-Graham, 2010).

From the comments, we learned that "social status" in women can play a bigger part in empowering them to have a say in their relationships. Students continue to illustrate that this fact doesn't however give women entire control over their choices. Women are now and then portrayed as seeking men to rescue them. This was supported by Motsaathebe (2009) who stated that though a significant number of women have begun joining professions in the media, biased and stereotyped representations of gender roles on television are still evident. That is, although some of the soap operas have made an effort to portray women in more responsible roles (the likes of Karabo, Thandaza and Livho), there still seems to be a picture of the emotional and weak woman in the background, despite all the surface glamour. For instance, after James demanded 45% shares of Thandaza's company, she was emotional and

frustrated and Ranthumeng had to fight her battles. She was rescued by her uncles. However, recently women are better-educated and contribute in various spheres of society once regarded as male domains. Hence, it has become essential that the image of the stereotyped woman be dropped (Ogunleye 2005: 128). Researchers stated that gender stereotyping is undoubtedly South Africa's biggest challenge following the eradication of apartheid in 1994 (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010).

FM: P2 *"May be even being a gangster women helps you know. For instance Lucy Diale 'mama skebengu' as she calls herself. Nobody messes around with Lucy, even her boyfriend Mrekza who appeared to be hard-core at first is scared of Lucy. Actually a lot of men around Alex knows not to mess with Lucy. She is dominating them."*

The above state made by one student takes us back to the stereotype of "social status" where women are respected due to their achievement not necessarily because they human beings. That is, although Lucy may not be necessarily educated, she is respected and feared by the community due to her status.

FM: P1 *"In any case, women will always be perceived as housewives, even if they are the working classes when they both get home either as boyfriend and girlfriend or wife and husband the woman will still have to make sure she prepares supper."*

FM:P6 *"And no matter how much we as women still think it's unfair, we are already practicing such roles here at varsity. Your boyfriend will be calling and telling you he is coming over tonight. Regardless of how exhausted one feels from lectures you will start preparing dinner for the two of you."*

FM: P5 *"Educated or not as a woman one always find themselves doing those wife duties. Some of us started having sex because we felt it's our responsibility to please our men else they leave you for someone who is willing to do it."* Men: *(laughing)*

It is evident from the data that the stereotyping of gender roles is still an issue among students. Both males and females study towards professions such as medicine which were in the past assumed to be for men. This does not necessarily make men respect the women who are now studying towards these professions, and many still see their girlfriends as cooks. The

more female students challenge assumed gender roles, the more likely they are to risk their relationships. Therefore, for the sake of keeping the relationships they are forced to conform. Some students reported having sexual intercourse before they were ready just because they were afraid their partners would leave them for other girls.

Cheney (2005:12) attests that “gender schema or the cognitive structures that organize individual’s gender related knowledge, preferences, beliefs and attitudes, plays into how people learn what is expected from them”. “These gender roles are frequently generated based on gender stereotypes” (Kinnear, 2007:126 in Bornstein, 2013). As indicated by the participants, these stereotypes can have negative impacts on their relationships. As noted, guardians normally follow socially characterized patterns regarding these roles and have a tendency to socialize their children accordingly. Parents are likely to fail in teaching them about intimacy and sex. Youths rely on their friends and media for this information and these sources provided them with plenty of examples on romance (Calza & Ward, 2009).

### **5.3 The Influence of Soap Operas on Sexual Expectations in Relationships**

During the discussions the influence of sexual expectation was raised. Ward (2003) stated that the age of growth may not only influence exposure to, but also comprehension and interpretation of sexual content portrayed by media. When it comes to youth and media’s depiction of romance and sex, there is ample evidence that stereotypical gendered depictions of romance and sex exist (Ward 2003). Henceforth, exposure to formulaic content of youth media may outline sexual attitudes and stereotypes and encourage the long-lasting adoption of these schemas.

*FM: P6 Imagine, bumping into a random guy at the club and he offers to buy you drinks. After a few drinks, then he thinks he is entitled to sleep with you. I mean are we that cheap and easy? All these annoying behaviours are triggered by exposure to media representations of women.”*

Escobar-Chavez et al., (2005) and Ward (2003) support these codes by indicating that in the past years, proof has shown that youths’ exposure to sexual media content is linked to a range of gender stereotypes and sexual beliefs. Students suggested a caution to the producers as

they write their shows. This view was also supported by Baker and Raney who recommended that, *“the ways that the characters on television are stereotyped should be brought to the attention of writers and producers, because it is only when they understand the implications of what they are doing that they can make an effort to minimise these portrayals”* (Baker & Raney 2007: 39).

FYP: P4 *“It’s so sad because children internalize these portrayals from the early age as soap operas are mostly watched in the evening by all the family members. Men are usually portrayed as dominant and violent. If the woman refuse to have sex, men usually force them into it. I mean what does a young man learn from that? To them it appears as if they are obliged to have sex with women, if she does not cooperate men are allowed to take it forcefully”*

FYP: P2 *“I think another thing is the issue of pimping girls or women, by men whom at first pretend to be in love with such women. These portrayals make men believe that they have power over women, they kind of give men the impression that women are part of their properties henceforth they can trade them and treat them like their slaves. It’s just wrong, it’s totally an acceptable.”*

FYP: P6 *“Yeah, Amos from Uzalo pretended to be in love with Nosipho only to find out he was planning to pimp her out. All these thing have an impact in our relationships, a lot of girls find themselves in the same situation whereby they have to sleep with older or rich men to support their boyfriends. All these ridiculous behaviours are learned from media portrayals.”*

Some students also proposed the need for clarity between love and sex to be stated.

FYP: P1 *“One other thing, soap operas make it as if people can no longer be involved in a relationship without having sexual intercourse. Love is not sex, people should know what they mean when they claim to love others”.*

FYP: P3 *“It is important that soap operas should teach youths about love, why you get in a relationship, as it seems like all it does is to give viewers the impression that all people get into a relationships for is sex.”*

FYP: P6 *“Yes that is absolutely crucial, it will help girls/ women avoid such situations as being pimped and feeling the pressure to have sex just to prove their love and their*

*commitment to the relationship even if they are not ready. For instance, Xolelwa from Generations the legacy was still a virgin and not ready for sex when she met the guy he assumed to be her boyfriend. She however felt the pressure to have sex with this guy just to prove her love and only realized after sex she has been used and betrayed. So, I think such education will help girls and women avoid these situations. Girls are being used most of the time while they assume they are being loved.”*

*FYP: P4 “I think something similar happened to Mapitsi from Skeem Saam. Mapitsi slept with her boyfriend Tbose just to prove her love for him and Tbose dumped her right after they had sex. It’s important to teach these young girls sometimes sex is just sex especially for men. Not every man wants to commit in a relationship, others just use love to get under your pants then its game over after they got what they wanted.”*

According to the quoted remarks above it would appear that these portrayals may expose young people to the material they watch on television, as they are in a state of cognitive developmental instability and grasp the material they observe in their television watching. Fiske (2004) stated that youths are attempting to build more concrete, advanced conceptions of themselves and may use their television watching as a model for that identity formation. Examples of sexual insinuations which youths are likely to imitate are portrayed soap operas. If caution is linked to the emergence of cognitive skills and determinations for identity development, then youths would be more careful, and even hyper-attentive to the messages they encounter in their media exposure (Fiske, 2004).

However, it was apparent that according to participants, these kind of portrayals put pressure on students and they end up following the protocol even if it’s not what they had anticipated - just to safeguard their relationships.

### **5.3.1 Dissatisfaction about sex**

Some students conveyed dissatisfaction at the stage in which sex is portrayed on soap operas. They explained that sometimes they enter into a relationship with certain expectations about sex only to find the opposite. Ganong and Coleman, (1997) supported the notion that ideas maintained by media and traditional romances may foster unrealistic expectations, such as

the myth of instant love demonstrated in a television show. These portrayals may influence individuals' behaviours, perceptions and expectations with regard to romantic relationships (Segrin & Nabi, 2002).

P: 10 *"Soap operas sometimes portray the opposite of what really happens in real life in regard to sexual activities."*

P5: *"I think they go deeper, like they always have that couple who is always in the mood of sex and then you go back to your girlfriend and she is not always ready for sex and one is like where is that mood".*

FSW: P4 *"Yeah, and they portray women as if they are always ready to be intimate but then when you get to your girlfriend hoping you'll just demand sex, she just turns you off for more than a week".*

FSW: P8 *"And all these they see on soap operas and incorporate them in real life "*

According to the participants, soap operas display betraying portrays of sex and it turns out what participants viewed on the television is what influenced their interest in dating. Similarly, cognitive behavioural models also assert that the beliefs and expectations one brings into a relationship are likely to affect feelings, thoughts and satisfaction within the relationship. Hence, Galician (2004), advises individuals to use television as just an "escape" that offers unrealistic romantic media portrayals and be smart and not incorporate them or use media models in real life. Past writers uncovered that network shows normally depend on overstated and far-fetched depictions of sentimental and sexual connections to pull in their target audiences (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999); even experienced viewers know this (Illouz, 1998). Younger viewers with less of their own encounters to contrast against may see these portrayals as social standards and frame unlikely relationship convictions and desires as needs be. Therefore, if youths are in fact watching the media's overstated and fictional representations to learn what to anticipate in their own relationships, the result will likely be dissatisfaction in their authentic relationships if they do not get what they anticipated.

The issues raised by participants with regard to dissatisfaction in relationships was further explored. Studies stated that watching sexually-oriented content has been linked to youths overrating the sexual activity of equals (Ward & Rivadeneyra, 1999), feeling dissatisfied in

their own absence of sexual activity (Baran, 1976), approving stereotypical opinions of women as sex objects (Ward & Friedman, 2006) and men as sex-driven (Ward, 2002).

FM: P2 *“They are betraying, you think your first time will be romantic with flowers and candles then you end up in very unattractive bed” (they laughed)*

FM: P4 *“Same for us men, we expect a sexy woman in a sexy lingerie and she still shows up with her normal underwear. Even worse, they always make it appear as if every time a man demands sex from his women it’s just going to happen because the woman will be in the same mood for all we know is your girlfriend can deny you sex for the whole month and one just have to suck it up.”*

Similarly, Driesmans and colleagues (2016) established that single college scholars felt more dissatisfaction about their past romantic relationships after watching a romantic comedy. The writers clarified that the exposure to unrealistic content prompted a different impact that caused dissatisfaction among the college students as their own romantic encounters did not match up to the unrealistic romantic ideals.

Initially, soap operas might appear to be real but some of the things they portray do not happen in real life. Hence it is important not to believe and cultivate everything one watches on television. As reception theory contends, the definition of the text cannot be detached from the reader. That is, viewers create their own meaning of the text, which is likely to be influenced by their historical background. Eco (1979:340) associates this “to semiotic principles of coding and decoding and believes that interpretation is socially positioned. He maintains that the variety of codes and sub-codes contained in a message, the socio-cultural circumstances of the reader, and the initiative taken by the reader, combines into a message that is plural and unique to each reader. However, the reader is not completely independent of the text”. Likewise, the interpretation of experienced and less experienced students on romantic relationships will differ as shown from the extracts. The historical background of each student is believed to have influenced their perceptions about portrayals on soap operas. In support of the above findings, theory Schema theory (Bem 1981) maintains that, during early stages, the comprehension of socially principal definitions of male and female

tasks, or gender role schemas is prolonged and polished. The physical maturing of the body and mind and the socio-cultural context defines how to assess and control these modifications and encourages adolescents to advance their social and sexual selves in ways that correspond with socially-existing gender roles.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter is a presentation of the study findings. It has outlined analysis of the data and has provided a discussion on the data that was collected from the focus groups and interviews carried out. It evaluated the influence of soap operas on gender roles and sexual expectations amongst university students. It is therefore safe to conclude from the comments that soap operas indeed have an impact on students' gender roles and sexual expectations in their relationships.

## **CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter focused on the findings derived from the results of the study. The concluding chapter will assist the reader to understand the study better (Hess, 2004) by sharing the conclusions reached and the way forward (Hamutumwa, 2014). This chapter will illustrate a brief summary of the discussion of findings presented in the preceding chapters. The researcher will also make recommendations for future research of the same nature.

### **6.2 Summary of Findings**

The present study sought to examine the effects of local soap opera portrayals on UKZN undergraduate students' romantic relationships. One of the research questions sought to determine students' perceptions of soap operas. Findings discovered that although soap operas are informative, they can also be over-exaggerated in their portrayal of events. Participants indicated that this is not an entirely bad thing, as they use soap operas for relaxation and escaping their lives. They also argued that they learn from characters' successes and mistakes and use the lessons when they are faced with similar situations in their relationships.

Participants indicated that they sometimes identified with characters on screen, while some showed that they learned about different cultures from viewing soap operas. They also learned about how relationships are handled by different cultures. As Lewis (1991, 2013) pointed out, television has huge social implications and the habit of television viewing cannot happen in a vacuum, resistant to the world outside. He further showed that there is more to television watching than just sitting down, changing channels and watching. That is to say, television viewing is a cultural practice which involves not only viewing but also ways of doing it (Lewis, 1991). When individuals watch television, they not only engage with the sound and pictures on screen, but also with the characters and storylines. The way in which people watch television is part of the social and cultural context in which programmes and other television formats are placed (Lewis, 1991). For instance, the findings were that participants learn about

fashion and notions of romance in relationships from soap operas. Soap operas also empower women by exposing them to portrayals of other successful women on screen.

Similarly, reception analysis highlights that audiences engage seriously with the specific text and obtain their own meaning - either different or similar - to what the creators of the text envisioned. That is, it holds that human beings are not empty slates who just observe something and take it as it is. The experience centres on the viewers' understanding or definition of television programmes, where these are progressively analysed within their daily context (Gray, 1999). From this perspective, it certainly seems that viewers, in this case undergraduate students, construct their own meanings from the portrayals on soap operas. For instance, findings suggest that soap operas are centred on infidelity. This perception could be interpreted differently by different participants. While some see it as encouraging unfaithfulness in relationships, one could see it as a warning or rather a lesson.

A further research question aimed to explore the influence of soap operas on the choice of real-life partners. The findings in this regard confirmed that there are certain traits individuals desire in a partner. Some of these characteristics become desirable due to the influence of television viewing. Participants listed the features that influence their choice of partner. Most of the participants emphasised the importance of personality traits in their choice of a romantic partner. The participants felt that if their partner is intelligent, easy to engage with, physically attractive and possesses relational skills such as affection, being supportive and has a sense of humour, then this was regarded as "the full package". There was, however, a slight difference in preferences between men and women. Women preferred intelligent, affectionate men with earning capacity, while men preferred physical attractiveness and support over any other characteristics. As literature indicated, women tend to stress personal characteristics such as kindness, consideration and earning capacity while men place a greater emphasis on physical appeal (Buss, 1989; Buss & Barnes, 1986).

While discussing these traits, findings indicated that participants sometimes envy couples on soap operas and wish that they had same partners as those on screen. For men, this comparison of couples was slightly disturbing, as they argued that it puts relationships under

a lot of unnecessary pressure which might result in couples fighting or even lead to break-ups.

The third research question sought to establish whether soap operas had any impact on gender roles and sexual expectation in learners' romantic relationships. The findings affirmed that a great number of students were aware of stereotypical images regarding gender roles on television and the possible influence of these depictions on romantic relationships. Some students showed concerns of some of the portrayals of women on screen, while the others acknowledged the portrayal of successful women by soap operas. They felt as though women were being misrepresented and frequently undermined. This view was also supported with literature which showed that women are diminished and the descriptions of both men and women tend to be clichéd and traditional. This is despite certain shows portraying characterizations that grant a more unconventional view of sex roles (Motsaathebe, 2009).

For this reason, participants called for producers and writers to exert caution as they design these soap operas, stating that they could be detrimental to viewers. Their fear was that some young people, especially males, may internalize what they watch on television, while young women may start viewing themselves as they are represented on television. As Bandura (1977) pointed out, since television watching involves the observation of others' conduct, it is regarded as a major medium through which youngsters learn about suitable behaviours, gender-appropriate conduct and the relative appeal of performing such conducts (Gunter, 1995). Additionally, literature suggests that men may be victims of traditional gender patriarchal norms which may encourage them to engage in dangerous sexual conduct, such as having numerous partners (Santana et al., 2006). It was revealed from the findings that there are plenty of love triangles on television, which could unintentionally encourage viewers to be involved in similar behaviour. It was clear from the referenced events on the four soap operas in question that men are more likely to want to be involved in these love triangles than their female counterparts. Traditional gender roles are also perceived as very influential factors on soap operas. Men mentioned to start performing "husband duties" at the early stage of a relationship, while women play "wife" roles in relationships. It therefore seems as though media and culture are working hand-in-hand in condoning these patterns.

Finally, findings show that soap operas expose stereotypical beliefs about sexual activities. Participants in this study indicated that sexual activities on soap operas are over-exaggerated. Participants showed that they never get what they expected as it was portrayed on television. Studies also asserted that the bulk of television representations construct rather narrow views of the sexes, often portraying women as sexual objects, caregivers or subordinates, while men are depicted as leaders and defenders (Arnett, 2002; Davis, 1990; Signorielli & Bacue, 1999; Ward, 1995). According to participants' responses, soap operas uphold the discourse of troubling femininity, which Mhlongo defines as "dynamics that constitute being a woman and the inequality experienced by many women in heterosexual relationships" (Mhlongo, 2013:48). According to the theory of troubling femininity, men are still classified as breadwinners whilst women are classified as dependent on men (Gupta, 2000). Since encoding each stereotypical representation involves initiating relevant gender schemas, media exposure is likely to play a critical role both in shaping schema content and in promoting their chronic availability. Men are, however, not the only possible victims of these risky portrayals. Women are also affected sometimes in that they are sometimes influenced to participate in transactional relationships.

Findings demonstrated that soap operas give people false hope, as they normally experience relationships differently from what was portrayed. As Baucom et al., (1996) put it, unrealistic romantic anticipations are generally not met in real relationships and therefore can lead to numerous adverse results, such as bad emotional and behavioral responses to relationship difficulties. Findings also showed that soap operas may support perceptions about gender roles that are restricted and possibly damaging for young people.

Finally, the current study discovered that soap operas have a greater influence on students' choice of partners, sexual expections and gender roles in comparison to traditional African model which relied on parents or elders for guidance in romantic relationships. Youths use soap operas as their top source of information on romance.

### **6.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

As the sample size of the current study was small and consisted only of students who stay in university residences, it is suggested that future studies on these issues should have greater sample sizes and span across more than one academic institution. Further, the population was composed of only black students and this could have resulted in findings being compromised. It would be a good for future studies of the same nature to be conducted across various races to determine if they share the same sentiments as the participants of the current study.

### Selected soap operas' characters used in the analysis:

#### ***Skeem Saam***

John Maputla:	Meiki's husband and a father to Thabo and Leeto
Lelo Mthiyane:	Mangaliso's girlfriend who almost burned Kwaito alive
Elizabeth Thobakgale aka Lizzy:	Mangaliso's girlfriend
Zamokuhle Seakamela aka Kwaito:	A victim to Lelo
Meiki Maputla:	A family woman, married to John
Leeto Maputla:	Meiki and John's elder son, also married to Mokhali
Thabo Maputla aka Tbos:	John and Meiki's last born. He also dated Mapitsi at high School and later dated Enhle.
Jama:	A gentleman who dated Ayanda
Ayanda:	A girl who used to be a slave to her previous boyfriend Mkey and later dated his roommate and a friend Jama.
Mangaliso aka Baby-Maker:	He dated Elizabeth and later dated Lelo - they have a baby together
Mbali-Enhle:	Tbo's Varsity girlfriend
Mokhali:	Leeto's wife

#### ***Generations the Legacy***

Karabo Moroka:	A successful woman who married two men at the same time (polyandry)
Tau:	Karabo's first husband and an old criminal
Getty Diale:	Lucy's little sister, who lost her job and tried to start a new business but failed
Cosmo:	Getty's brother who helped during her financial struggles
Simphiwe Moroka:	Mazwi's first wife who died
Mrekza:	Lucy's boyfriend
Tshidi Mogale:	Gadaffi's ex-wife, who married him for financial security
Lucy Diale:	Alexandra's most-feared criminal

Mazwi Moroka:	Moroka's heir who cheated on his wife Simphiwe with Nolwazi
Zola:	Karabo's second husband
Sphe:	Mazwi's second wife (their marriage was arranged)
Gadaffi Phakade aka Kumkani:	One of the most well-known and feared criminals and abuser of women
Nolwazi:	Mazwi's side chick
Xolelwa:	An orphan who tried to make a living through transactional sex
Akona:	Nicola's girlfriend with a good personality and a very attractive body

### ***Uzalo***

Ayanda:	Pastor's son who dated Sbahle but was trapped into marrying his friend Smangele
Sbahle:	Once a prostitute but later dated a pastor 'Ayanda'
Smangele aka Sma:	A lady desperate for Ayanda's love. She ended up faking pregnancy in order to get him to marry her

### ***Muvhango***

Ranthumeng:	Married to Thandaza but cheated with Tebogo
James:	Thandaza's friend and business associate - they later became enemies
Azwindini:	The king of Thaate who is involved in polygamy
Edward Mukwevho:	Thandaza's first husband who passed on. He also cheated with Doobsie
Doobsie:	Thandaza's husband's side chick
Tebogo:	The woman who slept with Ranthumeng. They have a son together
Susan:	The King's first wife
KK Molaudzi:	A successful business man who dated Tshidy
Nonny:	A receptionist

Vusi: Thandaza's son, who could have gone to Harvard University but gave up his dream because his girlfriend was pregnant

Livhuwani aka Livhu: Another successful woman with her own company

Tshidy: KK's girlfriend who was not allowed to work but made to be housewife and mother to her boyfriend's son

Mudi: KK's son, whom Tshidy bailed out of jail to look after.

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## Appendix I: Ethical Clearance



16 November 2015

**Ms Palesa Agnes Mahlatsi (214580106)**  
School of Social Sciences  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Ms Mahlatsi,

**Protocol reference number: HSS/1439/015M**

**Project Title:** An investigation of the effects of local television soap operas on romantic relationships amongst UKZN undergraduates students on Pietermaritzburg Campus

### Full Approval – Expedited Application

In response to your application received on 06 October 2015, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol have been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

/pm

Supervisor: Dr Janet Muthoni Muthuki  
Academic Leader Research: Professor Sabine Marschall  
School Administrator: Ms Nancy Mudau

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Dr Shenuka Singh (Chair)

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Website: [www.ukzn.ac.za](http://www.ukzn.ac.za)



Founding Campuses ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

## Appendix II: Gate Keeper's Permission Letter



18 June 2015

Ms Palesa Agnes Mahlatsi  
School of Social Sciences  
College of Humanities  
Pietermaritzburg Campus  
UKZN  
Email: [214580106@stu.ukzn.ac.za](mailto:214580106@stu.ukzn.ac.za)

Dear Ms Mahlatsi

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

Gatekeeper's permission is hereby granted for you to conduct research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) towards your postgraduate studies, provided Ethical clearance has been obtained. We note the title of your research project is:

*"An investigation of the effects of local television drama series on romantic relationships amongst UKZN students in Pietermaritzburg Campus".*

It is noted that you will be constituting your sample by approaching students from the Malherbe and Brucian residences, who are willing to participate in an interview, on the Pietermaritzburg Campus.

Please ensure that the following appears on your notice/questionnaire:

- Ethical clearance number;
- Research title and details of the research, the researcher and the supervisor;
- Consent form is attached to the notice/questionnaire and to be signed by user before he/she fills in questionnaire;
- gatekeepers approval by the Registrar.

You are not authorized to contact staff and students using 'Microsoft Outlook' address book.

Data collected must be treated with due confidentiality and anonymity.

Yours sincerely

**MR B POO**  
**REGISTRAR (ACTING)**

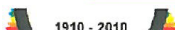
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**Office of the Registrar**

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## Appendix III: Informed Consent



Dear Participant,

My name is Palesa Mahlatsi (214580106). I am a Masters candidate studying at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus. The title of my research is: An investigation of the effects of local television soap operas on romantic relationships amongst UKZN students on Pietermaritzburg Campus. The aim of the study is to explore the effects of local television soap operas on romantic relationships. This will be done through critically scrutinizing the extent to which the audience of these programmes (*Skeem Saam, Uzalo, Generations: The legacy and Muvhango*) interpret the messages portrayed. I am interested in interviewing you so as to share your experiences and observations on the subject matter.

Please note that:

- The information that you provide will be used for scholarly research only.
  - Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have a choice to participate, not to participate or stop participating in the research. You will not be penalized for taking such an action.
  - Your views in this interview will be presented anonymously. Neither your name nor identity will be disclosed in any form in the study.
  - The interview will take about 45-60 minutes.
  - The record as well as other items associated with the interview will be held in a password-protected file accessible only to myself and my supervisors. After a
-

period of 5 years, in line with the rules of the university, it will be disposed by shredding and burning.

- If you agree to participate please sign the declaration attached to this statement (a separate sheet will be provided for signatures)

I can be contacted at: School of Social Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg Campus, Scottsville, Pietermaritzburg. Email: [palyceen@yahoo.com/palesmahlatsi@gmail.com](mailto:palyceen@yahoo.com/palesmahlatsi@gmail.com) ; Cell: 0739160089

My supervisor is Dr Janet Muthoni Muthuki who is located at the School of Social Sciences, Pietermaritzburg Campus of University of KwaZulu-Natal. Contact details: Email: [muthuki@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:muthuki@ukzn.ac.za) Phone number: 03326066462

The Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee contact details: Ms Phumelele Ximba, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Research Office. Email: [ximbap@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:ximbap@ukzn.ac.za), Phone number +27312603587.

Thank you for your contribution to this research.

DECLARATION

I..... (*Full names of participant*) hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire. I understand the intention of the research. I hereby agree to participate.

I consent / do not consent to have this interview recorded (if applicable)

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

## Appendix IV: Interview Guide

### Palesa's Interview guide

1. Which of these local television soap operas do you watch (*Skeem Saam, Uzalo, Generations: The Legacy and Muvhango*)?
2. Why do you watch this or these programme/programmes?
3. How relationships are portrayed in local television soap operas?
4. What ideas about relationship do you get from the local television soap operas?
5. Which ones are your favourite relationships in these local television soap operas and why?
6. Which are your least favourite relationships in these local television soap operas and why?
7. In what ways do you think the local television soap operas offer a representative picture of the romantic relationship?
8. What ideas do you get from these soap operas about what it means to be the ideal man / woman?
9. What influence do these local television soap operas have in your choice of a partner in a relationship?
10. How have local television soap operas informed you about different roles by men and women in a romantic relationship?
11. How has this influenced your role as a man/woman in your own a romantic relationship?
12. How have local television soap operas informed you about sexual expectations in a romantic relationship?
13. How has this influenced your sexual expectations in your own relationship?
14. What are the similarities between your own relationship and the romantic relationships portrayed on local television soap operas?
15. What are the differences between your own relationship and romantic relationships portrayed on local television soap operas?